

INSPECTION REPORT

THE ABBEY SCHOOL

Faversham

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number:

Headteacher: Peter Walker

Reporting inspector: Grace Marriott
3674

Dates of inspection: 8th – 12th October 2001

Inspection number: 219922

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Modern
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs L Temple
Date of previous inspection:	November 1999

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1292	Vera Foster	Team Inspector	Mathematics – Sixth Form	
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11746	Robin Coulthard	Team Inspector	Music	
30800	Betty Colley	Team Inspector	Physical Education Sociology	How well does the school care for its pupils?
22577	Margaret Hart	Team Inspector	Autism unit	
4617	Roslyn Fox	Team Inspector		How well is the school led and managed?

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Abbey School is a non-selective 11-18 co-educational school situated on the outskirts of Faversham in an area where there are selective schools. It has 968 pupils on roll with almost equal numbers of boys and girls. Although pupils come from a wide variety of homes, a significant number are from disadvantaged backgrounds and the number of pupils entitled to free school meals is higher than average. Most pupils are of white UK heritage, with a very small number from ethnic minorities or who have English as an additional language. The school also has a much higher than average proportion of pupils with special educational needs. Most pupils on the special needs register have moderate learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school has a special centre for autistic pupils. Most pupils are well below average standards, particularly in literacy and numeracy, when they join the school.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school is providing a satisfactory education for its pupils and no longer has serious weaknesses. Academic standards, though still well below the national average, are rising. The teaching is good and enables the vast majority of pupils to achieve at a level consistent with their ability and previous levels of work. There was little unsatisfactory teaching during the inspection. The head teacher, senior staff and governors are providing good leadership and a strong commitment to improvement which is supported by good action planning. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- The overall standard of teaching is good. Teachers plan and structure lessons well so that pupils understand the work and make progress.
- The school is well managed and the head teacher, governors and senior staff have set challenging targets.
- The school is genuinely inclusive in its approach and pupils' learning needs are well catered for. The learning support assistants provide very good support in class
- The school has good systems for target setting and for tracking pupils' progress and personal development
- The autistic unit is providing a very good education and support for the pupils. It enables them to be integrated into, and accepted in, mainstream classes

What could be improved

- Standards of literacy are not good enough to support pupils' work in subjects where literacy demands are high
- Information and communications technology (ICT) is not being used enough in most subjects
- The pupils need more specific guidance in how to improve their work and their learning skills
- A minority of pupils are not well enough behaved and not aware of the impact their behaviour has on others

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in November 1999 when it was judged to have serious weaknesses in management, standards of work and behaviour and in the facilities. The school responded positively to the criticisms. Since then the head teacher, governors and staff have worked hard to improve the school and have been successful, though they recognise that the school could improve further. The re-organisation of the management structure and key new appointments have improved the quality of management. The systematic monitoring of teaching has resulted in improvement and the development of a whole-school approach to teaching and learning. This is ensuring greater consistency in the quality of teaching and higher academic standards. Governors

now play a strong role in both the strategic management and the monitoring and evaluation of the school's work. The ICT facilities have improved and more ICT is taught, though it is still not used enough across the curriculum. The toilet facilities have been upgraded, and the canteen which was strongly criticised in the last report, is due to be re-built in the near future.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 11 and students at the end of Year 13 based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key well above average A average B above average C below average D well below average E
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	E	E	E	E	
A-levels/AS-levels	E*	E	E		

The results of the national tests taken in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 in 2001 show that overall, pupils are working at a level which is well below average compared to the national average and when compared to schools with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. However, in relation to the standards these pupils were working at when they started in Year 7, this represents satisfactory achievement. The standard of current Year 9 pupils is better, though still well below average. This reflects a slight improvement in their standards of work on entry to the school and the effect of good teaching.

The GCSE results in 2000 were well below average when compared with other schools nationally, and very low compared with those with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. However, when these pupils' GCSE results are compared with what their results at the end of Year 9, they did as well as pupils in similar schools. Also the proportion achieving 5 A* to G grades was average compared with similar schools and in terms of 1 A* to G grade, the Abbey School did better than similar schools. The national comparative results for 2001 are not yet available. The 2001 results show a significant improvement at GCSE, with the proportion of pupils obtaining 5 A* to C grades increasing from 20 to 26 percent and exceeding the school target. The school's results have improved at a faster rate than nationally and the school received an Improvement Award from the Department for Education and Skills.

In all year groups the pupils generally do better in the subjects where they are less dependent on good literacy skills. For example, in physical education (PE) standards are average and in design and technology and ICT standards are below average, whereas in English, mathematics, science, history, geography and religious education (RE) they are well below average. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall. The pupils who attend the autism unit make very good progress.

In the sixth form, although standards overall are well below average because there are relatively few higher grade passes, most students who want to continue into higher or further education achieve the qualifications they need. In general, students achieve better on the vocational courses, whether advanced or intermediate, than they do on the AS courses.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most pupils have at least satisfactory attitudes towards school
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Satisfactory. Though boisterous at times, pupils are generally good natured. A minority do not behave well and this can affect other pupils' learning
Personal development and relationships	Staff and pupils get on well together and relationships between pupils are satisfactory. Pupils' personal development is well supported
Attendance	Satisfactory

The school is working very hard to improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes. Most pupils respond positively to this, though many find academic work difficult and lack confidence. The support and re-assurance they receive helps them to make satisfactory progress in lessons. A minority of pupils are resistant to the school's efforts to improve behaviour and motivation, particularly when teachers are new or inexperienced. The school has very good systems for monitoring attendance and this has resulted in better attendance and less unauthorised absence.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Satisfactory

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The teaching is good overall, with six out of every ten lessons being graded good or better and well over nine out of every ten lessons satisfactory or better. There is relatively little difference between the teaching in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11. In the sixth form there is a significant amount of good teaching particularly on the vocational courses, but it is satisfactory overall because of some weaknesses in AS level. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. In the core subjects, teaching in English and mathematics was generally good and in science it was satisfactory overall, with some good and very good teaching.

In Years 7 to 11 the teaching was often better than the learning because teachers were working hard to motivate reluctant learners. Teachers are very patient and persevere with pupils who are not always attentive. In the good lessons in all subjects teachers work effectively to ensure that their pupils understand what is expected of them. They structure the work so that pupils make frequent small gains in knowledge and understanding which gives them confidence to achieve more. Relationships are good, and sometimes very good, and classes are successfully managed with little loss of time from learning and teaching. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good it is because expectations are not as high and the teacher did not have the same range of behaviour and class management skills. In Years 7 to 11 the small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was linked to inexperience which pupils exploited and the match of work to pupils' needs was not good enough. In the sixth form the weaknesses in teaching stem from a poor match of work to students' needs. The teaching of literacy and numeracy skills is too variable across the school as a whole. In the best lesson teachers took every opportunity to expand the pupils' vocabulary and their ability to express themselves well. In many lessons, although key words were on display they were not used effectively. Numeracy skills are used satisfactorily in some subjects but not enough in others.

The teaching in the autism unit is very good. It enables these pupils to be integrated as much as possible into mainstream classes and follow a curriculum which develops their academic potential and strongly promotes their personal development. In all subjects the learning support assistants make a very positive contribution to the progress of pupils with special educational needs. In science the contribution of the technicians is invaluable in ensuring that practical work can begin promptly.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Pupils receive good support, particularly from learning support assistants. The autistic unit is very good
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The few children are suitably supported and make appropriate progress
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	This is satisfactory overall, though opportunities to promote spiritual development are missed
How well the school cares for its pupils	The staff know the pupils very well and provide effective support for their academic and personal development

The partnership with parents is satisfactory overall. The curriculum meets statutory requirements in Years 7 to 9 though more could be done to develop literacy skills in particular. In Years 10 and 11 the curriculum is extended well by the provision of work related courses for pupils who are not suited to a full GCSE course. The provision of ICT in these years though good for pupils taking ICT courses does not ensure that all pupils receive their full entitlement. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship. The tracking and assessment system for Years 7 to 11 is good and helps staff to set suitable targets and monitor progress. This has not yet been extended into the sixth form. The use of the information is satisfactory overall but there is scope for departments to make more use of this information in planning the curriculum and target setting.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the head teacher and other key staff	Leadership is good at all levels with a clear sense of direction and purpose and a strong focus on raising standards
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are very well organised and informed about the school's work. They play a key role in setting its strategic direction
The school's evaluation of its performance	The evaluation of the school's performance is now good and is enabling the school to set challenging targets and raise expectations
The strategic use of resources	The school is managing its resources very well to promote its educational objectives

The head teacher, staff and governors responded positively to the previous report and have shown considerable determination to raise standards and improve the school. The partnership between

the head teacher and the governing body is now particularly strong and this has been of great benefit to the school. Staff at all levels carry out management responsibilities diligently and effectively. Where there are problems caused by the management structure, as for example in the sixth form, the head teacher and governors are aware of these and beginning to tackle them but the sixth form has not been the main priority in recent years. The introduction of rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning has been instrumental in bringing about improvement. There has been a period of rapid change in staffing, but the situation is now more stable and recent good appointments are helping the school to move forward. The accommodation is satisfactory overall, as are resources, though there are weaknesses in the resourcing of art, and the book stock in the library is limited.

PARENTS’ AND CARERS’ VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are accessible • Most children like school • Teaching is good • The school makes good provision for children with special needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework • Information for parents about pupils progress • Behaviour

Most parents are supportive of the school and the inspection team broadly supports their positive views. There is some justification for the comments about the inconsistency of homework and the concerns about behaviour. However, the school is very aware of the need to continue to work on these and neither is unsatisfactory.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM THE ABBEY SCHOOL INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The school has just under hundred students on roll, two thirds in Year 12 and a third in Year 13. The school offers GNVQ courses at intermediate and advanced level in art and design, graphics, ICT, business, health and social care and leisure and tourism. It offers AS level English, mathematics, design and technology, sociology and general studies, though few students take AS courses. GCSE re-sit courses in English and mathematics are also available. All students are expected to do work experience throughout their sixth form course. The students start their courses from a relatively low GCSE baseline.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is providing an adequate education overall. The standards overall are well below the national results, students on the GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses, achieve well compared with their previous standards and in ICT results are better than national results. These courses, which most students take, are well suited to their needs and well taught. The AS courses are less successful, both in results and the quality of teaching, though the numbers taking these courses are too small to allow for meaningful comparisons with national results. The sixth form is cost-effective, even though some groups are small. Several staff are involved in the management and development of the sixth form. This has resulted in some fragmentation of responsibilities and limited development of extension and enrichment activities. The head teacher and governors are aware of the need for a more cohesive approach to the management and development of the sixth form, and recent appointments at a senior level should make this possible.

Strengths

- The provision of a good range of GNVQ course at different levels
- The sixth form is responsive to local circumstances and is providing well for many students who might not otherwise continue with their education
- Relationships are good both between staff and students and between the students themselves

What could be improved

- The roles of those who manage the sixth form needs are not clearly enough defined
- Courses are not all as well matched to students' needs as they could be
- The opportunities for personal and academic development through an extension and enrichment programme which includes provision for key skills are limited.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan. Strengths and areas for improvement in individual subjects are identified in the sections on individual subjects in the full report.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

The table below shows overall judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses that were inspected in the sixth form. Judgements are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
English	Unsatisfactory mainly because the A Level course is not suitable for most students and the teaching is unsatisfactory because it is not well enough matched to students needs, although there are strengths in teachers' knowledgeable presentation of information.
Mathematics	Unsatisfactory. The AS level and GCSE courses are not the most appropriate for the students' previous levels of attainment and standards are low even though the teaching is satisfactory and teachers have secure subject knowledge.

Information and communications technology	Very good. Results in the GNVQ advanced course are above the national average. This represents very good achievement. Students have a good grasp of basic theory and confidently create complex data systems Teaching is very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and students are well motivated to learn.
Sociology	Satisfactory. Standards are below average because students start from a low base and their vocabulary is limited. However, they have made a satisfactory start to their course.
Art	Unsatisfactory. Standards of work seen during the inspection were overall well below the average for A Level and GNVQ qualifications although the standard of work of a minority of students was close to average. The teaching is sound but there are deficiencies in accommodation and resources.

Work was sampled in leisure and recreation, health and social care, graphics, business education, performing arts and general studies. In all these areas the quality of teaching was never less than satisfactory, and most of it was good. Students are achieving well on these courses and in general the students do much better on the GNVQ courses than they do on AS courses. They respond well to the opportunities for independent work.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Most students receive appropriate advice and guidance, in terms of choosing courses, during the course and in preparation for work or further education. A few are allowed to begin unsuitable courses which does not help them in the long term. The expectations of students' attendance, work and commitment to their studies, though satisfactory overall, are not always consistent.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Several staff are involved in managing the sixth form. They each work hard to develop the curriculum and related opportunities. The expansion of GNVQ and the attempts to ensure that all sixth formers have work-related experience are sensible. However, the overall co-ordination to ensure that what is offered is as broad and rich as possible, is not strong enough

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers are readily available for help The choice of courses suits their talents and aspirations The teaching is good They enjoy being in the sixth form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The range of extension and other activities The information given to them about how well they were doing and their options for the future How the school responds to their views and treats them as young adults

Most of the students surveyed were in Year 12 and the responses represent their views at an early stage of their courses. The inspection team broadly supported the positive views of the sixth form and the comments made on the range of activities. Many Year 12 students are not yet fully aware of the range of support available or the extent to which students have been consulted. The new careers guidance programme is good. The feedback on students work is satisfactory overall and generally good for the GNVQ courses, but more specific guidance and marking is needed on the AS courses.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Inspectors make judgements about provision in subjects and courses, and about leadership and management, in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement “outstanding” in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to “very weak”.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The school's results, though still well below average, have improved at a faster rate than results have nationally and the school received an award from the Department for Education and Skills in recognition of the improvement.
2. Pupils join the school in Year 7 with well below average standards. The results of the national tests taken in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 in 2001 show that overall, pupils are working at a level which is well below average compared to the national average and when compared to schools with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. However, in relation to the standards these pupils were working at when they started in Year 7, this represents satisfactory achievement. The standard of current Year 9 pupils is better, though still well below average. This reflects good teaching and a slight improvement in their standards of work on entry to the school. In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science both boys' and girls' results were well below the national results. Girls did slightly better than the boys, as is the case nationally.
3. In 2000, teacher assessments in Year 9 in other subjects were well below average in most subjects and below average in music and physical education (PE). In art they were above average but the evidence from the work indicates that these assessments were too generous. Teacher assessment last year in modern languages and design and technology showed standards which were well below the national expectation, but current Year 9 pupils are doing rather better and are working at below average standards. Most other subjects are showing improvement but this is not yet reflected in assessment in Year 9.
4. The GCSE results in 2000 were well below average when compared to other schools nationally and very low compared with those with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. However, when these pupils' results are compared with what they achieved at the end of Year 9, they did as well as pupils in similar schools. Also the proportion achieving 5 A* to G grades was average compared with similar schools and in terms of 1 A* to G grade, the Abbey School did better than similar schools. The national comparative results for 2001 are not yet available. The 2001 results show a significant improvement at GCSE, with the proportion of pupils achieving 5 A* to C grades increasing from 20 to 26 percent and exceeding the school target. Girls did better overall than the boys by about the same amount as nationally, but unusually, in science, boys did relatively well compared to their other subjects and girls relatively badly. In 2000 pupils achieved their best results in design and technology, English and PE, worst overall in geography, modern languages, ICT, art and business studies.
5. In English in Years 7 to 9 pupils are most successful in speaking about their personal experiences and opinions, though most do not have a wide enough vocabulary to express themselves clearly and precisely or to read complex texts with understanding. However, they enjoy reading-aloud activities. By the end of Year 9 a few pupils write detailed essays on books and plays, sometimes using quotations as evidence to support their interpretations but most pupils usually confine their answers to recounting events. Standards in spelling, punctuation and handwriting are lower than they should be. This reduces the overall quality of work of almost all pupils, and especially that of boys. Similarly in Years 10 and 11 pupils' weaknesses in speaking and listening, and their limited vocabularies, affect the quality of their written work and their understanding

of what they read. However, given their starting point, most pupils achieve at a satisfactory level.

6. In mathematics the work seen during the inspection reflected the tests and examination results. Standards are still well below average, but are improving, and current pupils also achieve well in relation to their attainment at the start of Year 7. Many pupils struggle with mathematics because of their limited numeracy skills. However, an 'express' group in Year 7 is working at a much faster rate and their work is of an above average standard. The work expected of the middle ability groups is broadly average which represents a considerable challenge for many pupils, with higher ability groups undertaking more demanding work. For example, in Year 8 higher-attaining pupils have completed work on simplification of algebraic expressions and on trigonometry. In lower groups pupils are learning new concepts and gaining confidence in basic numeracy. Attainment and achievement are similar in Years 10 and 11 some pupils in the intermediate level GCSE group are able to cope well with higher level work including quadratic equations. There is evidence of good investigation work, some of which has involved using ICT.
7. In science pupils generally achieve satisfactorily as they move up through the school, though not as well in their understanding and in the skills needed in scientific enquiry, as they do in their knowledge of science. Most pupils have a reasonable recall of scientific facts but many have difficulty in applying them in new situations. This lack of understanding shows itself particularly in practical work where pupils often have a weak understanding of the principles involved when testing hypotheses.
8. In all year groups the pupils generally do better in the subjects where they are less dependent on good literacy skills. For example, in PE standards are average and in music, design and technology and ICT standards are below average. Whereas in English, mathematics, science, history, geography, and RE they are well below average. Standards in modern languages are below average. In some lessons, for example in geography and RE the use of writing frames and key words are helping pupils structure their written work. However, this is not done consistently across all subjects and pupils do not make as much progress as they could. Similarly with numeracy pupils have limited computational skills and are often not confident or accurate enough in using these in other subjects. Pupils' general lack of confidence in their ability, and some lack of motivation, also affects their research skills. They are reluctant to find information for themselves and have only limited ability in this area.
9. The work in ICT lessons and in pupils' folders indicates that attainment overall is still below the national expectation in Years 7 to 11, but improving. By Year 9 pupils are developing knowledge and skills in a range of applications but there is insufficient use of measurement and control and only limited understanding of the applications and effects of computers on society. Current work in Years 10 and 11 indicates that standards are also improving. Pupils build on their good achievement in previous years. They continue to extend their knowledge and skills in set projects. Pupils follow good strategies for identifying and analysing problems but there are few examples of drafting and redrafting of work.
10. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall in the light of their clearly recorded starting points. In some subjects, for example design and technology, ICT and history, they make good progress. Pupils are mainly supported in subject lessons, but there are some small withdrawal groups, for example in the literacy Catch Up programme. In Years 10 and 11 the provision of courses such as the ASDAN

Youth Award and other work-related courses enables pupils to achieve well. Pupils who attend the autism unit make very good progress both academically and socially.

Sixth form

11. Although standards overall are well below average because there are relatively few higher grade passes, results are at least in line with predictions based on GCSE results. Most students who want to continue into higher or further education achieve qualifications which enable them to do so. In general, students achieve better on the vocational courses, whether advanced or intermediate, than they do on the AS courses. In the subjects sampled: leisure and recreation, business studies, health and social care and the performing arts, students are achieving well and their current standard of work is broadly in line with the national expectations for these courses.
12. In the subjects inspected in detail, standards varied very considerably. In mathematics, standards are below those expected of AS students and below those expected for students retaking GCSE examinations. AS students in Year 13 studying a unit in pure mathematics could use a general rule to generate a sequence, but had difficulty in finding a general rule for a given sequence. They were able to solve simultaneous equations algebraically and find roots of quadratic equations by formula. They sometimes had difficulty evaluating numbers with negative indices. Students following the GCSE course had weak numeracy skills: many had difficulty adding a column of seven numbers without the aid of a calculator. However, students' achievement and the progress they make, is satisfactory on both AS and GCSE courses when compared to their abilities and their standard of work at the start of the course.
13. The most recent ICT results were better than the national averages both for the proportion of students completing the course and for the achievement of merit and distinction grades. Advanced students present work to a high standard and show a good level of all-round competence in a number of software applications. Spreadsheets with advanced formulae showing employees' attendance rates and clear design specifications that meet user requirements for a fictitious business are examples of work where creativity and challenge feature strongly in students' design specifications. Pass rates on the intermediate course are satisfactory, considering the students' GCSE achievements before they started the sixth form course. Overall, sixth form ICT results are now better than they were at the time of the last inspection due to consistently good teaching and better computer equipment.
14. In sociology, the standard of attainment observed during the inspection was below average. However, it is early in a new course and students have made a satisfactory start. At this stage, the students discuss topics satisfactorily and are beginning to make links between different aspects of society, though their lack of vocabulary is limiting their progress.
15. Results in art have been broadly average but the work of current students is well below average, which reflects to a large extent the difficulties in staffing when they were in Years 7 to 11. They did not develop a wide enough range of skills and have gaps in their knowledge and understanding.
16. In English, the written work seen during the inspection showed that most students competently recount the plot and discuss character in the texts and most work is based on information provided by their teacher. While this structures their answers helpfully, it does not enabled students to produce detailed, analytical answers independently, and so to develop their skills and understanding. Difficulties in spelling and grammatical

accuracy continue to lower the quality of their work. GCSE re-sit students also make careful notes on the topics covered, but show limited understanding of concepts. For example, in a lesson on persuasive style, students had great difficulty in using alliteration and rhetorical questions.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

17. Pupils have sound attitudes to their work and to school life. They particularly enjoy the practical subjects such as design and technology, PE and ICT. In many of these lessons, pupils work hard, concentrate well and take a pride in what they are doing which leads to some good work. In some other subjects, and particularly when pupils are asked to write, teachers have to work very hard to encourage them to be enthusiastic and attentive. While they may do the work willingly enough, they are often passive and not eager to ask and answer questions. Most pupils respond well to various incentives such as merits. A significant minority of pupils find it difficult to concentrate and listen attentively. They quickly lose interest, fidget and are easily distracted and often make insufficient progress in lessons. When such pupils are supported by an adult who helps to maintain their concentration, they make sound, and sometimes good, progress.
18. Behaviour in lessons has improved since the last inspection and is often good. Teachers and learning support assistants have good strategies for maintaining order in the classroom in a positive and supportive atmosphere. A significant number of pupils who find it difficult to behave well. For example, they call out and speak while others are speaking or refuse to do as asked. However, lessons are rarely disrupted by such poor behaviour. Members of the senior management team are quickly on hand to deal with disruptions and pupils are removed to calm down. Behaviour around the school is satisfactory though it can become boisterous at times, with pushing in doorways and on the stairs. Some departments manage the behaviour of pupils in their corridors very firmly but this is not consistent throughout the school. Many pupils have still to learn to consider the thoughts and feelings of others. Pupils report that bullying does occur and a few minor incidents were observed during the inspection. Most pupils say that the school deals well with such incidents, though some pupils who had joined the school most recently were not yet sure about what to do if they or their friends were being bullied.
19. The school has a strong and effective inclusion policy. Pupils with special educational needs respond well to what the school offers. They gain confidence through in-class support, and through the summer literacy programme. The special educational needs base, housing the Support Centre, is a welcoming and supportive environment. Students seen there were often confident, and gaining in independence and social skills. For example, pupils in Year 11 working on their ASDAN project conducted independent research for it out of school and incorporated this into their class work in the centre.
20. The number of exclusions rose following the previous inspection but has fallen again in the past year. The school is rightly pleased that the number of individuals being excluded has also fallen. Pupils work in an internal exclusion room for short term exclusions of under three days. Every exclusion over five days goes to a governors' review and every effort is made to support the pupils and their families and get them back in school.
21. Relationships throughout the school are sound. Adults provide good role models in the encouraging and supportive way they deal with pupils. Most pupils respond by being

polite and co-operative. Pupils generally get on well together, though there are often missed opportunities for them to work together in lessons. A few pupils are student councillors or form captains or are trained to offer peer support. However, there are generally fewer opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility and to use their initiative than are found in many schools. Pupils are very dependent on their teachers for re-assurance and support while they do their work. They do not always come with the equipment they need, for example for PE.

22. Levels of attendance are broadly in line with the national average and have improved since the last inspection. Pupils, particularly at Key Stage 3, are coming to school with increasing regularity. Most pupils arrive punctually, though some, for example in Year 10, arrive late for registration. The school has recently developed very good systems for monitoring and promoting attendance. This is an improvement since the last inspection and there are signs that it is beginning to have an effect.

Sixth form

23. Most students in the sixth form have sound attitudes to their work. They are keen to succeed and work hard to complete course work on time and to their best standard, but they also need much reassurance and support from their teachers. A few are less enthusiastic and, for example, do not carry out necessary research to use during lessons. Their behaviour is invariably good. They are attentive and conscientious in lessons.
24. Some students have responsibilities around the school, such as helping form tutors in PHSE lessons or acting as prefects. However, the sixth form students do not have a high profile around the school in performing helpful tasks to ensure the smooth running of the school. As in the main school, opportunities for taking responsibility and using initiative are limited. Relationships in the sixth form are good. Students work together constructively in lessons and appreciate being treated as young adults by their teachers. The development of their personal and learning skills is sound. Overall, students feel that the school offers satisfactory sixth form provision.
25. In the sixth form, attendance is satisfactory in lessons. However, the school needs to review the practice of allowing pupils a complete day of work experience each week. It should also make clear whether it expects students to be in school when they do not have lessons. The school does not monitor the attendance of students in the sixth form rigorously enough.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

26. The teaching is good overall, with six out of every ten lessons being graded good or better and well over nine out of every ten lessons satisfactory or better. This is a significant improvement in the last inspection where one lesson in five was unsatisfactory. There is relatively little difference in the teaching in the different key stages. In general teachers have good subject knowledge. They are interested in their subjects and want to communicate their own interest and enthusiasm to their pupils. They have a good understanding of the requirements of the National Curriculum and GCSE syllabuses.
27. In the good and very good lessons in all subjects, including the core subjects of English mathematics and science, teachers structured the work carefully so that the variety of activities kept pupils interested. They shared lesson objectives with pupils, often writing them on the board and referring to them during the lesson and in a review at the end.

This provided pupils with clear links with previous work and helped them to understand what they will be doing next. When planning lessons, teachers break the work down into manageable steps so that pupils understand exactly what is required and make frequent small gains in knowledge and understanding which give them confidence. This helps to raise pupils' own expectations of what they can achieve. Most of the assessment and marking of pupils' work is good, but this is not consistent across all subjects and in mathematics the marking is not giving pupils enough guidance on how to improve their work. Homework is too variable in both quality and quantity and is not being used effectively to support class work or consolidate knowledge and skills.

28. Careful questioning is a regular feature of the good lessons and is used both to check on and develop pupils' understanding. Clear explanations also help pupils to succeed. For example in geography the teacher's initial description and explanation provided a very good introduction to the study of Japan. In history the teacher was able to supplement the text and visual materials she had prepared on the Battle of Hastings by describing the re-enactments that regularly take place. This considerably extended pupils' understanding. In the good and very good practical lessons teachers made very effective use of demonstration. For example in a textiles lesson on making a child's learning toy, small group demonstrations of the sewing machine were used very effectively to teach pupils how to make a pocket.
29. Teachers manage classes skilfully so that pupils whose behaviour is challenging are not allowed to disrupt the learning of others. Teachers' expectations for behaviour are made explicit. Codes of behaviour are known and understood by pupils and used consistently and fairly by teachers. Learning support assistants are effectively deployed to work with individuals and groups which also helps to maintain good order and a purposeful atmosphere. Relationships are good, and sometimes very good, and classes are successfully managed with little loss of time from learning and teaching. The teaching was often better than the learning because teachers were working hard to motivate somewhat reluctant learners. The great majority of pupils do the work set, but rarely ask questions which show that they really are thinking about their work. In most classes a few are very reluctant to work and teachers are very patient and persevere with pupils who are not attentive. Learning is satisfactory overall.
30. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good it is because expectations are not as high and the teachers did not have the same range of behaviour and class management skills. They were not as consistent in implementing school policies and expectations. In some satisfactory lessons the work did not meet the needs of all pupils. In some lessons in science boys are allowed to dominate the question and answer sessions, and girls are not given enough opportunity to use scientific language orally. This slows down their progress. This particularly affected Years 10 and 11 where girls working at below average GCSE standards were noticeably more passive during lessons than the boys. In history teachers and learning support assistants had to spend too much time explaining instructions and materials to different groups and more could have been achieved if these had been better matched to different needs.
31. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was sometimes linked to inexperience, particularly in managing behaviour, which pupils exploited. At other times the match of work to pupils' needs was not good enough. For example in RE a drawing exercise did nothing to develop pupils' understanding of responsibility or improve their literacy skills.
32. The teaching of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills is too variable across the school as a whole which is not satisfactory. In some subjects, for example mathematics, geography, RE and art and in the best lessons in other subjects, teachers took every opportunity to

question pupils, to expand the pupils' vocabulary and their ability to express themselves well. In other lessons although key words were on display in class rooms they were not used effectively, nor was the questioning as systematic. Similarly the teaching and use of numeracy need to be extended more systematically across the curriculum. For example in design and technology both literacy and numeracy skills are used, but not as part of a planned programme. In most subjects teachers are not planning the inclusion of ICT. Where this is happening as in modern languages, the use of computers is proving valuable in developing pupils' knowledge and understanding.

33. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported. Teaching staff receive detailed information, including targets for those pupils with an individual education programme. Some departments, for example modern foreign languages make good use of this information in their planning. Teaching throughout the school benefits from the support given by the experienced team of teachers and learning support assistants. They provide effective assistance to ensure pupils achieve satisfactory outcomes from their lessons and match the progress made by their peers. In some lessons observed, However, teachers missed opportunities to benefit from the guidance supplied by the support team to adapt materials for identified children in their particular teaching groups. The teachers and learning support assistants show great skill in handling students who cannot cope in some or all lessons. They work with them in the Student Support Centre, providing them where possible with work in the same subjects they would have in their mainstream classes. For example, pupils withdrawn from lessons were seen using SuccessMaker to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.
34. The teaching in the autism unit is very well planned and very sensitive to pupils' learning needs. Teachers and assistants use ongoing assessment extremely well, adapting lessons as they go to ensure secure learning. The teaching and support help pupils to develop the confidence they need to succeed into some mainstream lessons. The pace of lessons is very good and time is well used, so pupils maintain their effort and motivation and enjoy their lessons.

Sixth form

35. The teaching in the sixth form is more variable than in the main school, though still satisfactory overall. In general the quality of teaching in the intermediate and advanced vocational courses is better than in the AS or GCSE courses. This is to some extent because the nature of the vocational courses is more suited to the needs of the students and provides a better follow-on from their GCSE courses than the AS courses do. The strengths and weaknesses of teaching in Years 7 to 11 are also apparent in the sixth form. In general teachers have good subject knowledge and explain work well. In the good and very good lessons the match of work to students' capabilities is very appropriate and leads to good learning.
36. In English, mathematics, sociology and art, students tend to rely too much on teachers directing their learning, rather than taking increasing responsibility themselves and becoming more independent. However, most of the vocational courses are encouraging this independent approach and students are developing at least satisfactory skills in research for, and the presentation of, assignments. For example the initial assignment in business studies required students to research and present their proposals for a new business in the town. They were given good guidance and, despite finding it a challenge, most had succeeded in producing work of a reasonable standard for the stage of the course.

37. The teaching of ICT is good. For example in a Year 13 lesson ICT lesson challenging tasks were very well planned to consolidate students' understanding of theory related to databases and students created customer databases for later interrogation. Teachers made lesson expectations very clear and a series of short deadlines in a lesson encouraged rapid progress and good learning.
38. The weaknesses in the teaching of English were usually the result of a poor match of the work to the students' needs. The evidence also shows that teaching has tended to focus on the content to be covered, with too little attention paid to developing students' understanding and building on their previous learning. The lack of a scheme of work covering the courses offered in the sixth form contributes to this weakness.
39. The quality of marking varies widely. It is good in some subjects and unsatisfactory in others. In English, teachers know their students well individually, and give much constructive advice in lessons, but they make too little use of assessment, including marking, to help them improve. Where marking is weak students are not given enough information on how to improve. Basic grammar and punctuation were not systematically corrected. One-to-one tutorials and reviews usually gave students more information and effectively helped in extending their learning. In some departments, assessment records are incomplete.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS

40. The curriculum for Years 7 – 9 is broad and balanced. All National Curriculum subjects are taught with drama incorporated into English and a personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme is taught during form tutor periods. A weekly citizenship lesson has been introduced from September, 2001. The issue of lack of time for some subjects identified in the last inspection has been satisfactorily resolved. The school has also improved the arrangements for pupil groupings which was identified as unsatisfactory at the last inspection. Year groups are divided into two bands, within which setting is used to create classes of balanced ability. In the current Year 7, information from primary schools has been used to create an "accelerated" set of more able pupils. Curriculum provision and teachers' expectations have been adjusted to meet the needs of this group.
41. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum has been thoughtfully developed to meet the needs and aspirations of all pupils and achieves good breadth, balance and relevance. They all follow a core curriculum of English, mathematics, science, technology, French, RE and PSHE. The banding system is used in combination with an options scheme to offer vocational and work-related courses to pupils who will best benefit from these and for whom the full GCSE course would not be suitable. The work-related curriculum is accredited through the ASDAN national award scheme.
42. Subject planning ranges from good to unsatisfactory. It is good in mathematics, design and technology, history, music and religious education and in English in Years 7 to 9. In other subjects it is satisfactory except for ICT in Years 10 and 11, where pupils not following specific courses do not receive their entitlement to develop their ICT skills across all subjects. This does not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. The development of literacy skills has not been consistent across subjects and the school has recognised the importance of improving literacy and vocabulary if standards are to be raised further. It has started a programme to improve teachers' knowledge of how to develop pupils' skills in reading and writing information texts in different subjects.

43. The curriculum is enhanced by good provision for extra-curricular activities. In sport the emphasis is on competitive team games – football, netball and basketball - and there is a good range of musical activity, including school productions in association with the drama department, as well as a range of instrumental and vocal groups. Pupils are offered study support through a homework club, lunchtime sessions and subject-based initiatives such as the French club.
44. The school has made good provision to ensure equality of opportunity and has been actively engaged in promoting social inclusion initiatives. Pupils with particular talents and gifts benefit from a good programme of extra curricular clubs where sporting opportunities are particularly strong. Curricular opportunities for pupils with special educational needs are good. The school has a focus on inclusion and most curriculum work takes place in lessons. Programmes for pupils withdrawn from mainstream lessons are, in almost all cases, designed to help them catch up and then return to these lessons. However, the school has designed opportunities for some pupils to have an amended curriculum where this is seen to be appropriate for some older students, and there are opportunities to pursue a range of vocational qualifications. A major strength of the school is the provision and high quality care provided for pupils based in the autistic unit.
45. The school plans a relevant programme of PSHE for all pupils in Years 7 to 11. It includes sex education, education in the dangers of substance abuse and aspects of careers education. Form tutors teach the programme, but this arrangement is not working well. The quality of delivery is very variable in the twice weekly short sessions of 20 minutes. Little was achieved in some of the sessions observed, whereas in others a more serious approach led to worthwhile work being done. PSHE is not given sufficient prominence in the curriculum, something the school has come to recognise. The teaching of citizenship has been introduced to all classes in Year 7 to 9 this year. Citizenship features in the timetable alongside the other curriculum subjects, rather than being incorporated into tutor time. This helps to convey the importance the school attaches to this area of work.
46. Careers education has improved significantly with the appointment of a new careers co-ordinator who has put in place a coherent programme for each year group. Pupils receive specialist support from the local Careers Advisory Service at key transition points such as Years 9 and 11, and in the sixth form as they look to higher education, training or employment. Pupils in Year 11 and the sixth form have been dissatisfied with the breadth of information available, but the new programme and enhanced careers library provision seek to address this. Good use is made of special “off-timetable” events such as Study Skills in Year 9, Into Industry Day in Year 10 and mock job interviews for Year 11 conducted by a team of local employers. All pupils have a two-week work experience placement in the summer term of Year 10. They are well prepared for the experience and keep diaries of their progress. These are used as a basis for follow-up work in Year 11.
47. Many links with the local community are well used to enrich the curriculum. Notable among these is the link with the East Kent Education Business Partnership, which provides valuable input to careers education and work experience. A work-related learning link with the local Fire Brigade offers Year 10 students challenging training as fire cadets. The school has a link with a major civil engineering company.
48. Good links have been built up with local primary schools. Primary pupils visit the school to use facilities such as the ICT suite. An annual football tournament is run for local

primary schools. Teachers visit primary schools to teach. Year 7 pupils correspond with their former primary schools to describe the transition to secondary education. The school's Youth Action Group is working on a project to tackle the issue of bullying with primary pupils and is planning a multi-cultural day event to raise awareness and interest in this area. Links with local secondary schools are in place, but there are plans to develop these further, particularly in the sixth form. There are good links with the local higher education college, which provide support and guidance for pupils thinking of embarking on degree courses. The number doing so is rising.

49. The school makes sound provision for pupils' personal development. Provision for pupils' spiritual development was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection and remains so, though some improvements have been made. For instance, each week now has a planned theme and tutors are given guidance on how to present the theme to their group. Unfortunately, the teaching of these PHSE sessions is inconsistent and often unsatisfactory. They do not contain an act of collective worship nor time for reflection. Each year group has two assemblies each week, which include a prayer or a time for reflection. Sometimes leaders of local churches are involved in assemblies. Often the themes provide useful moral or social guidance. Lesson plans now have space to identify opportunities for personal development within the taught curriculum, but these are seldom of a spiritual nature. RE lessons provide good opportunities for pupils to reflect on the place of religion in their lives.
50. Overall, provision for pupils' moral and social development is sound and some aspects are good. Pupils are taught right from wrong through the positive way any misdemeanours are handled. Pupils are expected to behave in a sportsmanlike way in PE lessons. A sound attempt is made to counter the stereotypical misconceptions which pupils bring to school. Most teachers take a firm line against swearing. Assembly and PHSE themes include both social and moral concepts, such as despair, community, gifts and talents. History and geography lessons encourage pupils to think about moral issues such as war and the problems of the developing world. A strong feature of the school is the inclusion of pupils from the autistic unit, as well as other pupils with special needs. They are integrated as much as possible into the life of the school, and this makes a valuable contribution to all pupils' social development. The school takes groups of pupils away on residential visits. Year 7 pupils benefit particularly from such a visit early in their time in the school, as well as from the summer school, which is held before they join the school. The PE and music departments make a very good contribution to pupils' social development through the team matches played and the various public and school performances given. For the majority of pupils, there are too few opportunities to take responsibility. Many pupils are very dependent on adults for re-assurance and support, both in lessons and in their personal lives. The school works well to raise their self-confidence and self-esteem.
51. The school makes sound provision for pupils' cultural development, with strengths in the music that pupils both perform and learn about, and in art. Visits to the theatre, for example to see 'My Fair Lady', and to art galleries and museums, help to broaden pupils' cultural experience. Visits to France and Barcelona increase awareness of other European cultures. Pupils have limited opportunities to experience and appreciate wider cultural diversity. Again, music makes a useful contribution here, as does RE. The English and art curricula do not encourage pupils to explore the wealth of cultural heritage.

Sixth form

52. The sixth form curriculum offers students choices between academic GCE AS and A level courses, intermediate and advanced GNVQ courses with GCSE resits in the core subjects of English and mathematics. PSHE and general studies are also taught. Students are given curriculum time to pursue work experience and community service. The number of courses offered each year is somewhat larger than the number taught each year: this is an indication of the school's wish for its sixth form to be socially inclusive and responsive to the needs of its students. The evidence of the inspection is that the school is most successful in its provision of vocational courses, which match the aptitudes and interests of the majority of students. It is least successful in providing academic AS and A level courses in which few students have the capacity to succeed, even when the one-year AS course is spread over two years. The curriculum planning is not taking enough account of students' achievements at GCSE. Resit courses in GCSE also offer little prospect of students enhancing their key skills. The provision for work experience and community service appears successful for some students. For example, it helps fulfil the requirements of a GNVQ course or when students' involvement in school-based community and support work enhances both their personal development and support for younger pupils. However, a number are not benefiting sufficiently from the opportunity and clearly need a more structured and regulated experience. The sixth form has been developed in response to students' wish to stay in further education in an environment, which is both sympathetic to their needs and supportive of their ambitions. In this respect it has been successful. It now needs to evaluate its provision and focus its further development on those areas of proven success which are most appropriate to students' preparation for the adult world.
53. The provision for students' personal development in the sixth form is limited. They are not expected to attend assemblies and RE is not taught. This does not meet legal requirements. Some students follow a general studies course, which includes drugs awareness and sex education. Some students are prefects and some help with PHSE lessons in tutor groups. However, sixth form students are not greatly in evidence around the school, setting a good example and helping with the day to day running of the school. A visit to Barcelona has been arranged but overall, students do not enjoy a broad cultural experience. The programme for personal, social and health education planned for students in Years 12 and 13 contains some relevant content, such as the study of rights and responsibilities. However, a good deal of what is planned would be more appropriately categorised as routine, though important, tutor activity, such as individual student mentoring. As in Year 7 to 11, the delivery of the PSHE programme in the short time available during tutor time at the start of the day is not satisfactory.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

54. The school provides a good level of care and support for pupils. Staff know them, and their families, well and are often able to pick up and deal with potential problems early. The school's expectations of good behaviour are made explicit in all school documentation, as is the policy for dealing with bullying. The systems to track the progress of individuals and groups of pupils as they move through the school are effective. This record of personal and academic progress informs discussions with parents and forms a crucial part of a whole-school monitoring system. From this information, the attainment and achievements of particular individuals and gender groups has begun to be analysed and used as a basis for improving teaching and learning. Child protection procedures are very good.
55. The school has made improving attendance a priority. As a result of close monitoring, pupils now in Year 8 have continued the improved attendance patterns they learned during Year 7. Good attendance has been given a much higher profile with the

employment of an attendance officer and assistant who phone home on the first day of absence and write letters to parents. An attendance leaflet has been circulated, emphasising the importance of not missing school. The education welfare officer is closely involved and a number of families have been prosecuted. The school, and other agencies the school works with closely, provide good support for families with particular problems. Weekly attendance figures for each tutor group are displayed and rewards given to groups and to individuals, from merit marks to certificates and prizes. Computer technology is used very effectively to record attendance for the afternoon session. Registers are marked in the first lesson, thus reducing opportunities for post-registration truancy.

56. As required, the special educational needs co-ordinator has a comprehensive record of pupils identified as having special educational needs. Information on these pupils is made available to all teachers. Confidential information is handled sensitively. Statutory reviews are carried out and recorded. The support manager is currently reviewing the system for drawing up targets for students on the register with a view to making them more precise for each individual and therefore of more help to teachers when planning work.
57. The school's policy for assessment, recording and reporting is comprehensive and detailed. Its implementation is closely monitored through the subject line-management links with the assistant head. This policy provides a framework for departments when subject specific policies and strategies are devised or amended. The improvement achieved in this area since the last report is continuing.
58. Procedures for assessing and recording pupils' attainment and progress are satisfactory in all subjects. They are good in design technology, ICT, modern languages, music and physical education. The assessment requirements of the National Curriculum at the end of Year 9 are met in full, as are the public examination requirements during Year 11.
59. The 'ASSID' system is a very effective and accessible electronic database. This is used to inform tutors and others responsible for monitoring pupils' performance and progress in all areas of the curriculum. Heads of department make good use of this information in order to place pupils in sets according to their previous attainment and to agree subject-specific targets with individual pupils. Examination targets agreed with pupils are shared with parents. Potential under-achievement is identified and appropriate action taken. This system will be extended during this year to include sixth form students.
60. By enabling the detailed analysis of assessment data, the school has been able to identify opportunities to build on success and further drive-up standards. The use of assessment information to guide curriculum planning is of increasing importance in all subjects, though there is scope to exploit it further.

Sixth form

Assessment

61. The school's assessment and monitoring of students' academic performance are currently unsatisfactory. However, the good procedures and systems that have been established in Key Stage 3 and 4 will in time be widened to include the sixth form. In the meantime the reporting systems follow a format that is no longer in use in the rest of the school. Extended information, about students' progress and achievements, unlike the system in place in Years 7 to 11 is not as easily accessible. Heads of department are not able to make rigorous comparisons of progress and achievements across subjects as part of their monitoring of students' work and progress,

62. The school is actively seeking ways to ensure funding is made available to support the students with special educational needs who wish to continue their studies in the sixth form.

Advice, support and guidance

63. The discussions with students revealed a very uneven picture of support and monitoring. The guidance on the GNVQ courses and for students in Year 13 is good. Most students receive considerable assistance with applications for higher and further education or employment. The new careers programme is also good. Overall, the support and guidance for students new to the sixth form, and in the early weeks of their chosen courses, are not satisfactory. This reflects the somewhat fragmented nature of the management of the sixth form. Several students had made changes to their subjects since the start of the term, with apparently little regard to relevance to future plans and ensuring a good match with their prior attainment. As a result a number were following unsuitable courses.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

64. Parents are broadly positive about the school. They feel that it is approachable if they have problems or concerns, and this was confirmed by the inspection. One of the strengths of the school is the way it involves parents at a very early stage, to try to resolve difficulties that pupils are experiencing, with their behaviour or their attendance, homework or studies. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are fully involved in reviews. Many parents attend the open evenings when they can discuss their child's progress with the teachers. Good communication is also maintained through the use of 'planners', which parents and tutors must sign and which are used for messages as well as for recording homework and merit marks.
65. The quality and quantity of information for parents is satisfactory. The prospectus contains useful, up-to-date additional information but the 'glossy' part, while attractively presented, is out of date. The governors' annual report is very detailed, with lively reports from each sub-committee and each faculty. Interim reports have recently been introduced and these are very useful in giving parents, and the school, more frequent information about each pupil's progress and attitudes in every subject. End-of-year reports are satisfactory overall, though variable in the information they give. Some give a clear idea of what the pupil can do in a subject but most refer only to the pupil's attitude to the subject. All give a predicted grade and exam results as appropriate. Pupils are graded on a five-point scale for quality of work, effort, behaviour, personal organisation and homework, but the grades do not always match the text. Communication with parents is a regular and essential feature of the special educational needs work, for example during the statutory annual reviews.
66. Many parents take very little interest in the life of the school. A number of children are allowed to stay at home and do not attend regularly. Some parents do not ensure that pupils do their homework and come with the right equipment. Some pupils are too tired to concentrate well. However, a high proportion of governors have children at the school and this provides another route for communication between parents and the school.

Sixth Form

67. Students have mixed views about the sixth form, though satisfactory overall. Some were positive and felt well supported, while others would like more direction and

supervision and did not feel that they have enough information about future courses and careers. Many students did not feel that they are consulted enough about sixth form matters, though the Year 13 students have opportunities to make a significant contribution to the school. Many of the students had only just started their courses and were not yet fully aware of the range and quality of support available to them, nor of the amount of consultation. The school aims to provide a secure environment in which these students can continue to grow in confidence. In this it is successful.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

68. Leadership and management of the head teacher and key staff are good. Leadership was judged to be satisfactory in the 1999 inspection report and management was judged to be unsatisfactory. This was because the head teacher had retained his vision for the school as an establishment where pupils yet to experience success in their education could be nurtured, but the weaknesses identified in the school's first inspection had not been remedied and new ones had emerged. The report acknowledged that the head teacher had a willingness to tackle serious management issues and actions taken since then support this view. The head teacher has addressed these weaknesses and, as a result, the school community as a whole now has a shared commitment to improvement and the capacity to develop further.
69. The head teacher has refocused the work of the school on its mission statement to promote high standards of work and behaviour whilst enabling all to reach their full potential as valued members of society. The delegation to staff with management responsibilities is good. The school has a new management structure with some recently appointed staff, including a new deputy head and roles and responsibilities have been re-designated. There is a strong feeling of commitment, support and a desire to succeed within the whole staff. Each member of the new senior management team has clearly defined responsibilities and monitors well the work of their assigned teams. They support the head teacher effectively and are beginning to have a marked effect upon the work of the school. A number of key appointments at middle management level have also been made. New subject leaders, such as the heads of religious education, physical education and modern foreign languages, have made a good start and are supporting the school well in its drive to raise standards. Management of departments is satisfactory overall and good in mathematics, English, music, modern foreign languages, design technology, ICT, PE and special educational needs. The management of the autism unit is very good. The monitoring and development of teaching by subject team leaders is satisfactory overall and good in mathematics, English, PE and modern foreign languages.
70. The governing body now plays a very effective role in shaping the direction of the school. There has been a restructuring of the governing body and the chair of governors and the vice chair are new appointments. They meet with the head teacher regularly and play a full and active part in the life of the school. They discuss a variety of issues, ranging from examination results and progress of subject areas to the provision of a new school canteen and a new science block. Individual governors are named on the school improvement plan as monitors for developments such as the re-launch of the parent teacher association. The governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They meet most of their statutory responsibilities, but do not yet meet the requirement for a daily act of collective worship or for full provision of ICT at Key Stage 4.
71. The school's planning for its future development is good. The head teacher implemented an interim action plan following the last inspection and has since established a good five-year plan. It includes an appropriate range of targets and priorities and focuses very clearly on improving standards and the quality of teaching and learning. It clearly outlines intended impact, actions to be taken, timescales, person responsible, costs, clear success criteria and monitoring procedures. Departmental development plans both reflect and are supported by this plan. Teachers contribute

effectively to the overall direction of the school by identifying issues within their own areas, which are then carried forward to the main development plan. The system for performance management is good.

72. Special educational needs provision is well managed. The support manager for special educational needs leads an effective team of teachers and learning support assistants, co-ordinating a large network of activities and ensuring these are recorded efficiently. The links with outside agencies and the local authority are extensive and effective. The 'ASSID' system provides staff with easy access to important information and has been refined to meet the needs of the team. It provides ready information about the development and progress of students. In-service training makes provision for all staff, including the learning support assistants, who are encouraged to obtain appropriate qualifications.
73. The school organises its finances very well. All spending is very carefully linked to planned developments and the school's improvement plan. The spending of individual departments is closely scrutinised. Departments have to prove that any applications for allocations from the special developments fund are realistic and clearly related to appropriate departmental and school priorities. The school seeks tenders where appropriate and makes decisions over purchasing based on quality and value, and not merely on cheapness. The finance committee of the governing body rigorously challenges expenditure and financial planning reflects the school's strategic planning. Special grants, such as that for the autism unit and special educational needs, are scrupulously spent for their intended purpose. The administration of finance is very carefully organised. The finance officer, herself a parent governor, prepares monthly balance sheets and keeps the head and governors very well informed. The school constantly monitors all aspects of its provision to ensure that it secures value for money. Savings are made, for example, by employing maintenance staff suitably skilled to carry out a rolling programme of interior decoration and running repairs. Long term contacts for services are regularly reviewed to ensure value for money.
74. The school has used effective recruitment strategies and as a result has sufficient staff with the qualifications, experience and expertise to teach the current curriculum. The induction programme for all new staff is effective, and mentoring by more experienced staff and monitoring of performance are used well to develop teaching skills. Teachers are deployed well and effective arrangements for in-service training are in place.
75. Non-teaching staff make a valued and positive contribution to the smooth running of the school and there are good procedures for their experience and advice to be taken into account. For example the regular meetings between the deputy head, site manager and finance manager, which are very effective in identifying, costing and implementing improvements both within the school and around the site. The provision of support staff for pupils who have special educational needs is good and they are well deployed to meet the needs of pupils. Technical assistance is appropriate for a school of this size.
76. The school continues to make good use of its accommodation and will in the near future replace the poor canteen area. Arrangements are in place to build new dining accommodation and the new building will also provide additional classroom areas, which will replace the demountable classrooms. The school will be able to re-site music, art and graphics and in the longer term make improvements to design and technology rooms and sixth form accommodation. The proposed plans will give improved access for pupils and students with physical disabilities.

77. Since the last inspection the school has continued to improve the learning environment and as a result, corridors and the majority of classrooms are well cared for. The development of the science laboratories has created a new suite of rooms and this is enabling more efficient use of resources and better teamwork within the department. Extensive improvements have been made in the provision of computer rooms and these are distributed well around the school. The grouping of classrooms for subjects is helpful in making more efficient use of resources. Provision for the sixth form has improved and is being reconsidered further as part of the current new building programme. Toilet facilities have been improved as part of the school's well-focused programme for refurbishing and redecoration.
78. Overall, specialist accommodation is satisfactory and provision for physical education has improved. However, provision for art is at present considered unsatisfactory because of the lack of a clean workspace and lack suitable accommodation for sixth form work. Although the recently developed computer room in design and technology has improved accommodation in that area, the condition of fitted furniture in food technology rooms is poor and the working environment in resistant materials is not conducive to teaching the current National Curriculum.
79. Teachers work hard to use the accommodation to best effect. The site manager and his staff are making a considerable effort to maintain and improve aspects of the school's environment and make the best use of the budgets available and the cleaning staff work throughout the day to keep the school clean. The school has made significant improvements to the working environment and this had a positive effect on pupils' attitudes. The school is making good use of available budgets to improve accommodation.
80. Resources are satisfactory overall, with strengths in music, modern foreign languages, history, and information technology. The recent provision for ICT is particularly good. Computers are located in a number of rooms, linked to particular departments and the learning resources centre. This has improved the potential for the use of ICT in faculties such as humanities where access had been limited. Library accommodation is good within the learning resources area, but the stock of books is unsatisfactory in terms of quantity, age and appropriateness. Departmental use of the learning resource area is monitored and indicates that science and English use the area most with only limited use by other subjects. In art pupils are not supplied with sketch books and the provision of small tools in resistant materials is unsatisfactory in terms of both quantity and quality. In mathematics many text books are old and uninspiring.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

81. Senior managers and governors recognise the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form. They have responded well to local circumstances by establishing a sixth form that enables students to remain within a familiar environment which gives them confidence. The school strongly encourages students to remain in higher education. Teachers work hard to ensure that students stay at school and that their needs are met. They also advise them to consider alternatives when appropriate.
82. Developing the sixth form has not been the school's main priority over the past two years, but the general principle of developing vocational courses is fully accepted by staff and governors. However, too many people have responsibility for managing various aspects of the work. As a result assessment, tracking student performance, and the best match of the curriculum to the needs of students are not well enough co-ordinated. The recently appointed sixth form co-ordinator has produced good guidance for teachers, but does not have sufficient authority to ensure that these

procedures are followed. Her role is related to care and support. She does not have responsibility for the sixth form curriculum.

83. As a result of these weaknesses, the school's aims and values for sixth form work are not explicit enough to ensure that the school is providing the best courses for all students, particularly those who want to take the more academic courses. Governors are not yet doing enough to help shape the future of the sixth form and are not meeting their statutory responsibilities with regard to the teaching of RE.
84. Leadership and management of particular departments vary considerably. It is good in the vocational areas such as the GNVQ courses of business studies, leisure and tourism and ICT, where students' work is well co-ordinated and they make good progress. It is unsatisfactory in subjects such as mathematics and English and has weaknesses in art. In mathematics, no appropriate priorities have been identified for development in the subject in the sixth form and there has not been enough professional development for post 16 teaching. There are weaknesses in planning in English and in art the work on Years 12 and 13 does not build sufficiently on what students have done previously.

Resources

85. The sixth form is generously staffed in most subjects, as group sizes tend to be small. This reflects decisions about the courses in offer. However, the costs of running the sixth form are met from within the budget allocated to it, and the sixth form is not being subsidised by the rest of the school. The school currently makes arrangements from its own budget to enable students with special needs to stay on into sixth form.
86. There are few specifically sixth form facilities. Many sixth form lessons take place in ordinary class rooms though the work in some of the vocational areas takes place in specialist rooms. For example the business studies area is reasonably spacious, well organised and well equipped. The plans to upgrade the social accommodation are sensible and will enable disabled students access to the sixth form. In most subjects resources are at least adequate, and ICT resources are good. The most serious deficiency is in art where the lack of an area where sixth formers can work independently, is restricting their progress.

The Autism Unit

87. The Abbey School has a unit for 16 pupils who have autism or Asperger's Syndrome. These conditions involve difficulties with learning, specifically in the areas of social behaviour and communication. Admission to the Unit follows decisions by the Local Education Authority, and the school, that the pupils can benefit from education in this setting and can spend at least some time in ordinary classes. The provision for these pupils is very good.
88. It is not appropriate to judge attainment for pupils against the usual age-related standards, because of their special needs. However, academically, their achievement and progress are very good. Some pupils gain good passes at GCSE examinations, others reach good standards in Certificate of Achievement tests. A few pupils have areas of high ability in specific subjects such as mathematics and music and attain very well. Pupils also achieve very well in learning social and communication skills. These help them to cope with school life and prepare them very well to take their future place in society.

89. Teaching in the Unit is consistently very good. The relationships of all staff with pupils and with each other are excellent, as is the teamwork of teachers and learning support assistants. This gives pupils a feeling of complete security in the Unit and allows them increasingly to venture out into the main school with the confidence that they will be well prepared and supported. Lessons in the Unit are very well planned and include attention to things that “mainstream” teachers can take for granted – such as whether language is to be taken literally or whether adults are joking. Staff use a wide variety of methods and approaches appropriate to this pupil group, adapting them well. For example, each student begins the day by writing up the activities planned for him – a helpful approach for autistic pupils. Teachers and learning support assistants are extremely sensitive to pupils’ learning needs and use ongoing assessment extremely well, adapting lessons as they go to ensure secure learning. There are high expectations of both behaviour and learning, and study skills are explicitly taught so that pupils evaluate their own work and try to find ways of improving it. The pace of lessons is very good and time is well used, so pupils maintain their effort and motivation and enjoy their lessons.
90. When unit pupils attend ordinary lessons they are usually supported by a learning support assistant. The quality of this support is very good. Learning support assistants set the right tone with a warm greeting and invitation to come with them to a lesson, and they use the time spent walking to the lessons very well to reassure and prepare pupils. During the lessons they encourage and explain, while subject teachers take care to provide detailed lesson notes and to ensure that the unit pupil is drawn in to the lesson and fully included. Unit staff need to have a wide range of knowledge to be able to support pupils in all subjects, and both teachers and learning support assistants demonstrate very good subject knowledge across the curriculum. Pupils ask for help when they have not understood fully, for example, when they have not been able to complete their homework, and all staff respond swiftly and positively to requests for help. The very good teaching leads directly to the very good progress and achievement of all the pupils.
91. The curriculum for Unit pupils is very good. All the subjects of the National Curriculum are addressed either in the Unit or in the main school, at levels appropriate to the needs of the pupils. In addition there is the curriculum directly related to the special needs of the pupils - difficulties in communication and understanding of social interactions. Direct teaching about how to behave and how to understand other people’s behaviour goes on throughout the day and is particularly evident outside lesson times – before school, at break and in the lunch hour. At these times staff remain with pupils, providing a very good social setting for them, talking through situations to reduce their anxieties, and promoting good relationships between pupils. These social times are at least as valuable as the lessons themselves and are of enormous benefit to the pupils. The contribution of the learning support assistants to these sessions is outstanding. Pupils take part in a wide range of activities which supplement and enrich the curriculum. They attend after school clubs and sports practices, go swimming in Faversham, taking turns to collect the money and buy the tickets, and they have opportunities each term to go bowling, climbing and abseiling, and to practice archery.
92. All staff exercise very good standards of care for the pupils. Their safety, comfort and emotional well-being are promoted with total consistency. This includes close and effective communication with parents and carers, through visits, telephone calls and frequent use of the home-school books. There is very good support from outside agencies – for example, the unit benefits from the services of a specialist speech and language therapist for two days per week, working directly with pupils as well as

advising on individual targets and plans. Pupils' achievement and progress are very well tracked through both formal and informal systems of sharing and recording information. Daily briefings and regular staff meetings ensure that all staff are up to date on the needs and progress of all pupils. Inclusion in ordinary lesson is very well monitored and promoted.

93. The Unit is very well managed. Policies are well conceived, comprehensive and fully implemented. Staff are extremely well deployed, and very effectively inducted and trained. The Unit manager promotes awareness of the work of the unit very well to pupils, ensuring that all new Year 7 pupils visit the Unit at the beginning of the school year. She also attends curriculum and pastoral meetings in the main school and liaises very effectively with subject teachers. There is still room for autism awareness to develop further within the main school, and the Unit manager is aware of this need. Relationships with outside agencies, including bodies specifically concerned with autism, are very good
94. There is a sufficient number of teachers and their experience and training equip them very well for their work. Both the quality and training of the learning support assistants are very good indeed. However, with increasing numbers of older pupils in different "options", it is becoming more difficult to support all pupils adequately with the numbers of staff available. The school is using its own resources to support one student in the sixth form for whom support has not yet been agreed with the Local Education Authority. Resources for learning are generally good. The Unit accommodation, however, is deficient in several respects; the speech and language therapist is obliged to work in the corridor. There is not a room where parents can be interviewed privately. There are insufficient toilets to ensure satisfactory arrangements for staff and pupils and this will be made worse in the future when one or more girl pupils are admitted. There is very little storage space, and there is no staff room. There is a lack of appropriate facilities in the area outside the Unit, although plans are in hand to improve this situation. There is also no safe footpath from the Unit to the main school, and pupils have to walk through the car park.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The school has made considerable progress in improving the quality of teaching and management and is beginning to see the effect of this in higher standards. In order to raise standards further, the head teacher, staff and governors should:

- (1) develop pupils' communication skills so that they express themselves more effectively both orally and in writing by systematically:
- emphasising the correct use of key words when pupils write and speak
 - developing the use of teaching techniques such as writing frames
 - employing regular question and answer sessions to develop pupils' listening and speaking and their knowledge and understanding;

Paragraphs 5, 8, 32,42,116,100, 115,131

- (2) improve pupils' skills in ICT and comply with National Curriculum by:
- extending the use of ICT in most subject areas
 - improving subject planning in both key stages, but particularly in Years 10 and 11, to ensure that all pupils receive their full entitlement to ICT
 - including opportunities for measurement and control in subjects such as design and technology and science;

Paragraph 32,42,102,109,117,125,128,133,141,148,151,153,157,182,189

- (3) improve marking and use information from assessment more purposefully:

- to develop pupils' learning skills and independence
- to inform them more fully how to improve their work;

Paragraphs 27, 39, 60, 102, 107, 126, 131,140, 182

- (4) improve behaviour by:

- implementing behaviour management strategies more consistently
- matching work more closely to pupils' needs where this is a factor in unsatisfactory behaviour.

Paragraphs 18, 31,146,187,165

Sixth form

- (1) match courses more closely to the needs of students by:

- taking greater account of students' attainment at GCSE
- re-defining the roles of staff with sixth form responsibilities to avoid overlap; and ensure that systems are more clearly focused on responding to students' needs;

Paragraph 52, 62,119,215,226

- (2) improving the opportunities for students' personal and academic development by:

- providing an extension and enrichment programme which also includes provision for key skills.

Paragraph 53

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Autism unit

To develop further the high quality work in this area the school should:

- 1) provide further training for school staff in working with autistic pupils;

Paragraph 93

(2) improve, as soon as practicable, the facilities within the unit and provide a safe footpath from the unit to the main school buildings.

Paragraph 94

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	147
	Sixth form	27
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		70

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 - 11							
Number	1	24	66	47	6	1	0
Percentage	1	16	54	46	4	1	0
Sixth form							
Number	1	2	10	11	2	1	0
Percentage	4	8	37	41	8	4	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages as in the sixth form each lesson represents four percentage points

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7- Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	874	94
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	180	18

Special educational needs	Y7- Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	51	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	476	12

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	8

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	39
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	66

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	9.8
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	91	100	191

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	34	42	40
	Girls	52	48	36
	Total	86	90	76
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	45 (28)	47 (42)	40 (39)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	19 (1)	20 (20)	6 (3)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	49	47	34
	Girls	70	40	42
	Total	119	87	76
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	62 (54)	46 (48)	44 (38)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	22 (12)	25 (23)	9 (16)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

Percentages in brackets refer to 2000

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	83	81	164

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	11	64	82
	Girls	31	76	81
	Total	42	140	163
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	26 (19)	85 (90)	99 (97)
	National	49.8 (47.4)	88.8 (90.6)	94.5 (95.6)

Percentages in brackets refer to 2000

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	29 (27)
	National	39.1 (38.4)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	42	71.4
	National	n/a	n/a

Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13)

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	9	5	14

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	16.1	12.5	14.8	4	0	2.7
National						

Figures in brackets refer to 2000

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	1
Indian	1
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	3
White	958
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani	1	
Bangladeshi		
Chinese	1	
White	195	8
Other minority ethnic groups		

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y 7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	67.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	14.9:1

Education support staff: Y 7– Y13

Total number of education support staff	25
Total aggregate hours worked per week	822

Deployment of teachers: Y 7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.7
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Average teaching group size: Y 7– Y13

Key Stage 3	18.8
Key Stage 4	19.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	2859884
Total expenditure	2814633
Expenditure per pupil	2953
Balance brought forward from previous year	4596
Balance carried forward to next year	49847

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	33.4
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	35

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	968
Number of questionnaires returned	151

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	34	54	7	3	2
My child is making good progress in school.	33	55	5	1	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	19	49	19	5	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	58	12	4	2
The teaching is good.	28	54	10	1	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	41	19	5	8
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	39	9	3	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	47	46	5	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	29	43	23	3	3
The school is well led and managed.	31	50	11	2	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	33	49	11	1	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	26	50	5	5	13

**PART D:
THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM,
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4**

ENGLISH

Overall, the quality of provision in English is satisfactory.

Strengths

- English results are improving, in the tests at the end of Year 9, and in GCSE
- Much teaching is good, and teachers work hard to help pupils be successful
- The curriculum planning for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 provides interesting, well-sequenced activities that build pupils' knowledge and skills systematically
- The English department is led and managed well, which has enabled it to improve the quality of education it provides

Areas for improvement

- Standards of literacy and speaking and listening are not high enough
- Pupils' attitudes towards learning, their effort, and their confidence in learning independently
- The planning of the GCSE curriculum is not systematic enough and ICT is not used enough
- Teachers need to make more use of assessment information to help pupils learn

95. When pupils join the school in Year 7, their standards in English are well below average overall. In 2000, the results in the national tests the end of Year 9 were in the lowest five per cent compared with schools nationally and with similar schools. They were lower than at the time of the last inspection. However, the results rose considerably in 2001, and were better than in any previous year. This was because of improvements to the curriculum and in the quality of teaching during the school year 2000-2001. As a result, pupils' achievement is satisfactory although the overall standard attained at the end of Year 9 is well below the national average in all areas of English.
96. Pupils are most successful in speaking about their personal experiences and opinions, though these are expressed briefly. Most lack the wide vocabulary needed to express themselves clearly and precisely, and to read complex texts with understanding. They enjoy reading-aloud activities. By the end of Year 9, the higher-attaining pupils have learned to explain the plot and characters' motives in their work on literature. A few write well-detailed essays on these texts, sometimes using quotations as evidence to support their interpretations. However, the average and lower-attaining pupils have difficulty in interpreting meanings, and so their answers are much briefer and usually confined to recounting events. In the lessons observed, the girls generally drew more fully on the ideas presented by the teacher and so wrote better answers. Standards in spelling, punctuation and handwriting are lower than they should be. This reduces the overall quality of work of almost all pupils, and especially that of the boys.
97. GCSE results in 2000 were significantly below the national average in both English and English literature. However, they rose considerably in 2001, and returned almost to the level reported at the last inspection. As in the tests at the end of Year 9, girls do better than boys although the difference is similar to that found nationally. Results in media studies have also been lower than the national figures. Results in drama have been very low, as at the time of the last inspection.
98. By the end of Year 11 standards are well below average in all areas of English. As in the other year groups, pupils' weaknesses in speaking and listening, and their limited vocabularies affect the quality of their written work and their understanding of what they

read. Although teachers often anticipate these problems and explain unfamiliar language, these weaknesses slow pupils' learning and contribute to their lack of confidence and independence in reading and writing. Most average and lower-attaining pupils answer more fully orally than in writing. They do best in written work that involves a narrative approach. Higher-attaining pupils make good attempts to use a wider range of language, but with frequent misspellings and inaccurate grammar in complex sentences. Pupils are prepared well for their GCSE coursework and examinations. For example, teachers help pupils to learn how to structure their essays by providing them with prompts to follow so that their work will be organised logically. Pupils' previously-completed work and the evidence of some lessons showed that the girls tend to take more care over their written work than the boys do. Overall, however, pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

99. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in all years. The work is often adapted well for them, particularly when they are taught in a set in which the most pupils have similar learning difficulties. Those who are unable to meet the requirements of GCSE, take a certificate of achievement course which meets their needs well. Learning support assistants often provide sensitive teaching to individuals or small groups. For example, this enables pupils from the autistic unit to take a full part in lessons, including answering the class teacher's questions to the whole class and reading a part in a play.
100. Pupils' difficulties in speaking and listening, reading and writing affect their learning in other subjects. For example, most pupils write as they speak, very colloquially, and so have difficulty in adopting a formal style such as for reports. There is too much variation in the way in which literacy skills are developed. Teachers are aware that pupils' learning is held back by their difficulties in literacy, but in general are not doing enough to teach them how to meet the reading and writing demands of their subjects. Key words are on display in most classrooms, but teachers do not often draw pupils' attention to them. In physical education, however, teachers make a point of exploring unfamiliar vocabulary, which helps pupils to discuss their work. The use of the library to develop research skills is not consistent across subjects. The school has recognised that improving literacy skills, together with pupils' vocabulary, is essential if standards are to be raised further and has started to improve teachers' knowledge of how to develop pupils' skills in reading and writing in different subjects.
101. The teaching of English is good overall. It was never less than satisfactory in all the lessons observed and good in about half. Occasionally, it was very good. Teachers work hard to motivate their pupils and improve their concentration and effort. In most lessons, teachers provide a good range of interesting activities that keep pupils busy and interested. They break the learning down into small steps which enable pupils to be successful, even when they are initially reluctant or hesitant. Teachers' manage pupils' behaviour well and so lessons are orderly. For example, teachers are very patient and positive in responding to pupils who ask for instructions or comments to be repeated because they have not listened attentively. Relationships are good, and teachers make much use of praise to encourage and reward. They explain the work clearly, and through good questioning try to make sure that pupils understand what they have been told. However, pupils are often reluctant to venture an answer, even when they know it, as they lack confidence. The purposeful teaching means that pupils' learning is satisfactory overall, even though some are difficult to manage and many are too dependent on adult help. These weaknesses affected learning in most of the English and drama lessons observed. The weaknesses in the teaching of the satisfactory lessons were that the pupils were given too little guidance in how to do the

task set, and what they were expected to learn from doing the activities was not clear enough.

102. The improvement in English is satisfactory. Standards and results fell after the last inspection, but have now recovered to the level they were at two years ago and are continuing to rise. The department is well led and managed. New curriculum planning for pupils in Years 7 to 9 provides a very clear basis for teachers to work from, and ensures that pupils in the different classes have equal opportunities for success within each topic studied. However, this good curriculum planning has not been extended beyond Year 9, and so teachers work from the GCSE syllabus. This means that the older pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in English are not developed systematically enough, although the specified coursework is covered thoroughly. Other areas that require attention include extending the use of ICT within English, and of the library to promote wide, independent reading. The department has introduced tests each year to check that pupils in Years 7 to 9 are doing well enough and to prepare them for the national tests in English. This has contributed to the recent improvement in achievement. However, teachers make too little use of assessment information to track pupils' learning over time, and to guide their future learning such as by setting specific targets linked to the work they are covering. The staff who are new to teaching English are being supported very well, although they still have to develop expertise in the full range of activities. Standards in drama are too low, but they are starting to improve because of better teaching and management of the subject.

MATHEMATICS

The quality of provision in mathematics is good overall.

Strengths

- Planning and assessment procedures are good
- Good teaching in all year groups.
- Pupils of all abilities make good progress
- Teachers give pupils encouragement and promote the development of their self esteem which enables them to be more confident and successful

Areas for improvement

- Marking does not always provide pupils with enough guidance on how to improve their work.
- Plans to include ICT to enhance teaching and learning are not yet being implemented.
- Records of assessments do not indicate National Curriculum levels except at the end of key stages.

103. Pupils join the school with knowledge, skills and understanding which are well below average. Just over a third had reached the expected standard by the end of Year 6 and many pupils lack basic computational skills. In 2001 the Key Stage 3 results at the end of Year 9 though still well below average, show that a greater proportion have reached the expected standard. (Level 5 or above) than previously. These results indicate that standards are rising and more pupils reached the standard this year than in previous years. Overall pupils in Years 7 to 9 are achieving well relative to their starting point. GCSE results are well below average but have also improved steadily over a number of years. In 2001 a third of pupils entered achieved grades A to C and two fifths gained grade A-D. Girls and boys did equally well and all pupils gained a grade. This represents satisfactory achievement.

104. The work seen during the inspection reflected these tests and examination results. Although overall, standards are still well below average, they are improving and current pupils also achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry to school. The work in their books in Years 7, 8 and 9 is plentiful, well presented and covers work on shape, number and algebra, but less on data handling. In Year 7 an 'express' group is working at a much faster rate and their work is of an above average standard. The work expected of the middle ability groups is broadly average which represents a considerable challenge for many pupils, with higher ability groups undertaking more demanding work. For example in Year 8 higher-attaining pupils have completed work on simplification of algebraic expressions and on trigonometry. In lower groups pupils though are learning new concepts and gaining confidence in basic numeracy.
105. In Years 10 and 11 all pupils are entered for GCSE at Higher, Intermediate & Foundation level. The current pupils are still working at a well below average level but when compared with their standards at the end of Year 9 this represents satisfactory achievement. Some pupils in the intermediate level group are able to cope well with higher level work including quadratic equations. There is evidence of good investigation work, some of which has involved using ICT.
106. The teaching and learning of mathematics are good. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and a good understanding of the National Curriculum and GCSE requirements. In most lessons teachers have high expectations of their pupils in terms of the amount of work expected and behaviour. They manage behaviour well. They set clear learning objectives which they share with pupils and during the course of the lessons regularly check pupils understanding and refer back to the objectives. The end of the lessons is generally as brisk as the start, with teachers using the time well to consolidate and summarise what the pupils have learned. In a very good Year 10 lesson revision of pupils knowledge of the sum angles of a triangle at the start was used effectively to enable pupils to apply the principles to other regular shapes. They made real gains in knowledge and understanding. The feedback is positive and encouraging which gives pupils confidence. No time is wasted and by the end of each lesson they have produced a considerable amount of work.
107. The pupils' work is very well presented and is marked up to date with encouraging comments. Some but not all teachers write more specific comments which give pupils good advice on how to improve their work. Assessment and recording procedures in the department are good but teachers do not indicate the National Curriculum levels of completed work or test results.
108. The pupils are taught in groups according to ability. The lower-attaining groups cover a similar range of work to the others and most make progress because lessons are more structured, the exercises are simpler and there is more focus on the development of basic numeracy. The pupils with greatest learning difficulties are skilfully supported by learning support assistants to enable them to make good progress. However, not all teachers plan specific programmes for individual pupils who have particular learning needs at either end of the spectrum within an ability group. Sometimes the most able pupils are expected to complete work which is too easy for them before moving on to more difficult work. In a lesson on graphs in Year 8 the work gave the higher attainers in the class suitable practice in drawing graphs accurately, but did not really challenge them enough or extend their understanding.
109. The curriculum has been improved and is now good though not enough use is made yet of ICT which is recognised as an area for development. Training is beginning in the use of ICT to enhance mathematics learning, and the revision the existing schemes of

work will include a greater use of the good facilities. The planned daily use of ICT for the least able should enable them to make more rapid progress. The curriculum planning for the Year 7 “express” group offers the higher-attaining pupils more challenge. The need to address the pupils’ progress in literacy has already been identified and key words are displayed in the classroom and teachers refer to these in lessons. The teachers are expected to correct spelling and to help pupils to write accurately. The teaching of numeracy in mathematics is at least satisfactory and often good. The development plan identifies the need to audit the extent the teaching of numeracy in other subjects and to ensure that this increases.

110. The mathematics department is very well managed and the improvement in standards and learning are the result of good teamwork, staff development programmes and monitoring. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The head of department has focused clearly on the need to raise standards and monitors and evaluates the quality of teaching and the standard of pupils’ work and test results. The information gained is used to plan future developments and to help ensure that pupils are placed in the correct sets. The in-service training has been well focused on raising standards and helping teachers to develop both teaching and behaviour management skills. Resources are adequate overall, though some textbooks are old and rather uninspiring.

SCIENCE

The provision overall in science is satisfactory

Strengths

- The improved accommodation for teaching science
- Use of the very good facilities ICT
- Though still low, the improved test results in Year 9
- Teaching which is at least satisfactory, sometimes is good and occasionally is very good

Areas for improvement

- More emphasis on scientific enquiry to increase pupils’ understanding of science
- Higher expectations on the quality of writing in science, both pupils’ own notes and their scientific reports
- Better quality of questions to check and develop pupils’ understanding

111. The standard reached in the 2000 test for pupils in Year 9 was well below average compared with all schools nationally and was very low compared with similar schools. Boys and girls reached similar standards compared with the respective national averages for boys and girls. The overall result was lower than at the time of the most recent inspection and similar to the 1997 and 1998 standards. The 2001 test result for science was identical to that for the previous year.
112. In 2000 proportion of Year 11 pupils entered for the GCSE science (double award) examination and gaining A*-C grades was well below the national average. For grades A*-G, the proportion of pupils was below the national average. Compared with successes in their other subjects, girls achieved much less well than the boys, which was not the position at the time of the previous inspection. The 2001 science GCSE

results were lower than for 2000. As in 2000, boys did relatively well compared to their other subjects and girls relatively badly.

113. Pupils join the school with well below average attainment in science. They generally achieve satisfactorily as they move up through the school, though not as well in their understanding and in the skills needed in scientific enquiry as they do in their knowledge of science. Standards at the end of Year 9 are well below average. Most pupils have a reasonable recall of scientific facts but many have difficulty in applying them in new situations. This lack of understanding shows itself particularly in practical work where pupils often have a weak understanding of the principles involved when testing hypotheses. However, pupils do understand the importance of repeating measurements and of keeping variable features the same if their results are to be valid. Though standards are still well below average overall, pupils in Year 10 and 11 classes that are reaching the highest standards are working at average and sometimes above average GCSE standards. This is a somewhat better standard than the 2001 examination result. In their study of electrical resistance, for example, both boys and girls in one of the Year 10 classes of the most able pupils had a good grasp of the purpose of their investigation of resistance, could relate it to the theory they had recently been taught and took measurements confidently.
114. In Years 7 to 9, boys and girls generally achieve equally well, but this does not continue in Years 10 and 11. Here, girls fall behind, as is shown by their GCSE grades. Many of them are less actively involved during lessons than are boys. They mostly do all that they are asked, but sometimes without much enthusiasm, particularly those working at below average GCSE standards. Pupils with special educational needs, who are in the majority in some classes, achieve satisfactorily. The small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups achieve satisfactorily. Sometimes, the more able pupils in a class are not given enough work and do not achieve as well as they could.
115. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with some good and occasionally very good teaching. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed, which is an improvement on the last inspection. Lessons build successfully on previous work. Relationships are good, and sometimes very good, and classes are successfully managed, with little time having to be spent managing behaviour. The contribution of the technicians is invaluable in ensuring that practical work can begin promptly. Lesson planning is mainly good, enabling pupils to learn step by step, helped by suitable resources, including ICT and new textbooks in Years 7 and 8. Usually, there is plenty of work for pupils to do, though sometimes the most able pupils in a class have to wait before they can move on. In the best teaching, care is taken to find out how well pupils are learning: plenty of questions are asked at the start, throughout the lesson and again at the end when the lesson is being reviewed. But this is far from being the general pattern. Too often, lessons get underway without a clear enough picture developed of what pupils understand of previous work, and finish without the extent of their progress being checked. In some lessons, boys are allowed to dominate the question and answer sessions, and girls are not given enough opportunity to use scientific language orally. This slows down their progress. This is particularly the case in Years 10 and 11 where girls working at below average GCSE standards are noticeably less active during lessons than are boys.
116. Teachers and learning support assistants readily respond to pupils' requests for help. The great majority do all that they are asked to do, but rarely ask questions which show that they really are thinking about their work. In the best teaching, good attempts are being made to develop pupils' learning skills, but this is hampered by the lack of textbooks to take home for further study and, often, the homework tasks are not challenging enough. A lot of work in exercise books is copied. Overall, however,

expectations are satisfactory, except in another important respect where they are not high enough. Attention is not always sufficiently paid to developing the skills of scientific enquiry and to following this through into well structured and detailed reports of pupils' investigations. In the best teaching, pupils are taught how to develop hypotheses and then test them, but even here science is not contributing well enough to improving pupils' writing skills: reports of practical work are usually very brief. They do not help pupils to develop their understanding sufficiently or to prepare them to achieve as well as they could in written examinations

117. Very good arrangements have been put in place for the use of ICT in science. An ICT room, with sufficient work stations for a full class to use computers in pairs of pupils, has been set up adjacent to the laboratories. Effective use is being made of this for most of the expected aspects of ICT. Plans are in hand to address the remaining strand in ICT for science, namely data logging. ICT is making a good contribution to learning in science, as shown by a lesson involving simulation of an experiment on radioactivity and several instances where pupils researched information during lessons.
118. The head of department had taken up his post just before the last inspection. Since then, a number of sound improvements have been put in place, including a more developed system for keeping track of pupils' progress in Years 10 and 11. Standards have risen by Year 9. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. However, these and other improvements have not worked through into raised standards at GCSE, though in 2001 pupils did slightly better than might have been expected from their test results in Year 9. Overall, the management of science and the improvement since the previous inspection are satisfactory.

ART AND DESIGN

Overall, the provision in art and design is satisfactory

Strengths

- The quality of teaching has improved from unsatisfactory to good since the last inspection
- Departmental documentation has improved
- Pupils' behaviour is skilfully managed
- The provisions for pupils' with special educational needs is good

Areas for improvement

- Pupils' skills for learning through the use of sketchbooks, access to ICT and homework tasks
- Teachers' understanding of national curriculum requirements and levels of attainment
- Using assessment information to plan the small steps for learning and track progress year on year

119. Teacher assessments show standards at the end of the Key Stage 3 in 2001 to be above expectation, with no pupils attaining lower than level 4. The work seen and the discussions with pupils during the week of the inspection suggest these assessments were too generous. A group of pupils who had recently opted to take art for GCSE and were in Year 10 showed a great deal of enthusiasm for the subject but their skills of drawing, investigation, and their knowledge of artists' work, were overall below expectation.
120. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory and improves year on year. Given very low standards and a limited range of experiences before pupils joined the school, many

achieve very well though standards are still well below expectations. In a Year 9 class pupils made a good attempt at drawing imagined portraits based on the work of Giger and, with a lot of help, were able to translate their sketches into a relief mask made of clay. With guidance they added detail to facial features. Most gained a basic understanding of the preparation of the clay and firing process. For example they knew that if air pockets were left in the clay that the work could be damaged in the firing and a few could give a scientific explanation. For a homework task several pupils had used computers to gather information about where clay could be found and how it was used to make bricks and pottery. Although many had difficulty reading and particularly understanding the material, pupils were able to gradually built up a basic technical vocabulary to explain their own and Giger's work. Pupils in a lower set in Year 8 gave brief explanations on how they had used water colour paint to give form and a three-dimensional quality to their paintings of vegetables. However, several in the class were poorly behaved and this adversely affected the quality and the amount of work covered. Once settled, pupils achieved well in relation to their starting points.

121. The results are similar to the results at the time of the last inspection. GCSE results in 2000 were well below average although a significant proportion gained the higher grades. Very few boys were entered. The results of the 2001 show a fall, with less than a third of pupils attaining A*-C grades and very few higher grades. However, unlike the previous year, half of the number entered were boys and, as is the case nationally, boys overall performed less well than the girls. A significant number of both boys and girls did less well than predicted by their teachers. An explanation for the poor examination results lies in the unsettled staffing situation when, for several years, the department was without a stable team of specialist teachers. This has now been remedied but continues to have an impact on standards and pupils' achievements. Given the standards attained at the end of Year 9 pupils' achievements were sound.
122. The work seen during the inspection was well below national expectation. However, visits to national galleries have had a big impact on pupils' understanding and awareness of different art forms. They talk enthusiastically about work that they remember. Few pupils in Year 11 have enough documented evidence and explanations of how their ideas have progressed and developed. Most give a fairly superficial account of the artists they are studying and do not have the skills to reason and justify their opinions. Pupils in Year 10 have benefited from a more structured approach to basic skills and are already more confident and able to talk about how their work is progressing. Although the work is still at an early stage, it shows they are beginning to make independent decisions and recognise the possibilities for using combinations of different media. They had made good progress since the start of the term. Some Year 10 and 11 pupils use sketchbooks but their use is underdeveloped and having a negative impact on examination results.
123. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory overall. In most classes pupils were well behaved and co-operative and this enables the activities to begin promptly and ensure good use is made of the limited time available. In one Year 8 class, where the composition of the sets had been determined on the basis of technology groups, the behaviour and attitudes of a small number of boys were poor. Whilst the teacher and learning support assistants managed the situation very skilfully the learning of the rest of the class was severely disrupted. Pupils' personal development and the relationships between pupils and teachers are good overall. The teachers make good provision for pupils with special educational needs. The high numbers of pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties achieve well.

124. The quality of teaching is good and learning is sound. Teachers are experienced subject specialists and pupils' benefit from their expertise. They use demonstrations effectively as a means of raising expectations and helping pupils acquire new skills and learn different techniques. There are clearly expressed and understood codes of behaviour that result in orderly lessons and learning. Lessons are well structured and organised to ensure resources and materials are easily accessible and that best possible use is made of the fifty-minute lessons. Close attention is given to improving pupils' literacy skills and opportunities, for example to complete short written assignments, read, research and answer questions was a feature of all lessons. Pupils are gaining in confidence and are increasingly able to use a subject specific vocabulary to express themselves.
125. Pupils learning skills and the amount of work produced have gradually improved. Nevertheless, and despite teachers' best efforts, weak learning skills hamper the progress of many pupils. A significant proportion of Year 9 pupils do not remember to complete and bring in homework and cannot maintain concentration long enough see their work improve. Where homework is presented on scrappy pieces of paper it has little value to pupils and is easily lost. Pupils would be greatly assisted by having ready access to computers to help with research, presentation and spelling. As at the time of the last inspection pupils are not provided with sketchbooks and this valuable aspect of teaching and learning is lost. Pupils going on to do GCSE courses are greatly disadvantaged.
126. Management of the department is satisfactory. In a relatively short time there are signs of improvement but these have yet to be realised in improved GCSE results. The documentation is better than at the time of the last inspection. However, teacher assessments, of pupils' attainment and progress, needs to be more rigorously used both to plan activities and track pupils' progress across both key stages. A weekly fifty-minute lesson is less time than the majority of schools provide and pupils have insufficient time to produce work of quality and depth.

Design and Technology

Overall, provision in design and technology is good.

Strengths

- Pupils are achieving well and do better in design and technology examinations than in their other subjects.
- Teaching is good. The structured programmes of work and individual support in lessons enable all pupils to access the tasks set and achieve well.
- Many course work folders for textiles and food are of a high standard in terms of both content and presentation.
- Most pupils have a very positive attitude to their work in design and technology.
- A strong team of teachers are led well and committed to enabling pupils to produce their best work.

Areas for improvement

- Improving the teaching of computer based work in design and technology as required by the National Curriculum.
- Developing a more structured programme for the teaching of literacy and numeracy.
- Including more planned opportunities for pupils to appreciate the contribution which design and technology can provide for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Improving the working environment in design and technology work areas to make them more suitable for teaching the current National Curriculum.

127. By the end of Year 9, the results of teacher assessments are below the national expectation, but evidence of pupils' current work indicates that standards are slightly higher though not yet at the national average. Overall standards at GCSE in terms of A*- C grades have continued to be below the national average but results in 2001 for food, textiles and graphics continued the upward trend for these subjects, over the last three years. Pupils taking textiles and food have been the most successful with A*- C grades above the national average. Overall girls continue to do better than boys and gained most of the higher grades. Both girls and boys achieved a higher proportion of A*- G grades than the national average and this indicates that all pupils are benefiting from the structuring of courses and the good individual teaching which is taking place. Pupils continue to do better in their design and technology examinations than in their other GCSE subjects.
128. Work seen in lessons and folders of pupils' previous work, indicate that attainment overall is still below the national average in both key stages, but improving. Pupils, including those with special needs, make advances in acquiring knowledge, and their understanding of the design process is developing satisfactorily through all design and technology subjects through the school. This results in sound course work in content and presentation, and well-made practical projects. The work of higher-attaining pupils in both food and textiles is sometimes very good in terms of both content and presentation. In both key stages though there is some use of computers, and plans for this to be extended, pupils are not using ICT enough in designing and making activities. There are too few opportunities for pupils to include computer-generated work in their projects, particularly in measurement and control.
129. All pupils achieve well in both designing and making. The design process is introduced early in Year 7, knowledge is developed and the quality of research, development of ideas and presentation of work improve as pupils move through the key stage. In Year 7, pupils produce a fun pizza for 3 – 5 year olds using their own choice of ingredients. In Year 9, knowledge of ferrous and non-ferrous metals is developed and pupils research and develop design ideas for jewellery before making their ideas in enamelled copper. By Year 9, pupils' recording of their work in exercise books is satisfactory overall. The development and presentation of design ideas can be restricted but the work of higher-attaining pupils is good. Pupils enjoy practical work and demonstrate good practical skills when making their designed work in a variety of materials.
130. The structured approach to teaching about course work in Years 10 and 11 is enabling all pupils to access the requirements of the examination and achieve well. In the best folders the quality of research, analysis, and development and evaluation of ideas is very good. Pupils develop knowledge and skills and understand how materials and ingredients can be used safely, effectively and sometimes creatively in the development of their own ideas. Presentation of work is often very good Practical work is often very good because a range of skills are used well to produce well-finished products which meet the specifications set out in design work. Overall, all pupils, including those with special educational needs and pupils of lower prior attainment, make good progress because they are well supported through individual help and advice and this enables them to apply their technical abilities well.
131. Overall, teaching is good. The lessons seen were always satisfactory or better and sometimes very good. Teachers have very good technical knowledge and a clear understanding of National Curriculum requirements. This enables focused teaching, including demonstrations that set high expectation of pupils' work, and this is very effective in guiding and reinforcing pupils learning. For example, in a Year 8 textiles

lesson on making a child's learning toy, small group demonstrations of the sewing machine were used very effectively to make a pocket before applying the skills learnt in individual work. Overall, planning is good, However, some lessons could be improved by more detailed planning in order to focus pupils' learning more effectively. For example, in several lessons, teachers did not explain fully to pupils the marking criteria for finished work as a means of raising expectations. In the majority of lessons, time is used well, pupils are managed well and a range of teaching methods are used very effectively. A particular strength of good teaching is the individual support that pupils receive in most lessons, because this enables pupils of all ability to focus their learning and make progress. Some basic skills in the use of language and number are being included in pupils' work but there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to practise these skills in a progressive, planned programme of work. Marking of work is consistent and the regular assessment of pupils' work is effective in enabling pupils to improve their work.

132. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. Most pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations of behaviour and are keen to do well in their work. Most concentrate very well in lessons and many Year 10 and 11 pupils spend considerable time and effort outside lessons improving their work. The success of lower ability pupils is a positive reflection of the effort and concentration that they give to their work.
133. Schemes of work are being developed well and most National Curriculum requirements are fully met. However, although there are plans for the use of the recently acquired computer equipment, at present, there is insufficient development of this aspect of design and technology. Leadership and management are good and close co-operation between teachers is enabling good courses to be developed and standards to be raised. Departmental documentation is good and there is a very positive approach to monitoring the development and improvement of the subject. Staffing is good but at present some aspects of design and technology accommodation are unsatisfactory. Teachers make effective use of available accommodation but the condition of fixed furniture in food rooms is deteriorating and the environment in resistant materials is not conducive to teaching the current National Curriculum. Although aspects of learning resources such as the new computer room are good, the quantity and quality of some small tools, equipment and books is unsatisfactory.

GEOGRAPHY

The quality of provision in geography is good.

Strengths.

- The good quality of teaching and learning in all years
- Pupils are achieving well as a result of the good teaching
- The leadership and management of the subject

Areas for improvement

- Raising the attainment of pupils in GCSE examinations
- Giving more guidance when marking pupils' work on how to improve it
- Making more use of ICT in the learning

134. Pupils join the school with knowledge, skills and understanding which are well below the average, particularly in terms of their literacy skills. In 2000, the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 showed that a third of pupils reached the expected standard, the proportion of pupils achieving higher levels was very small. The figures for 2001 show an increase which is evidence that standards have risen since the last

report. Girls outperform boys by a wide margin. Overall, pupils in Years 7 to 9 are achieving well relative to their starting point, even though the standard is well below average at the end of Year 9.

135. GCSE results have fallen since the last inspection. In 2000, they were well below the average when compared with national results. Pupils achieved less well in geography than in any of their other subjects. No pupils were entered for this examination in 2001.
136. The work of pupils in Years 7 to 9 seen during the inspection reflected the teacher assessments. Pupils achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. They are able to apply a developing range of skills in their studies of places and themes, for example, Year 9 students made good use of atlases to locate countries as they considered different indicators of development. Low-attaining pupils in Year 7 understood four-figure grid references and used these most effectively. While the work of all Year 8 pupils reflected a good understanding of how a river erodes the land, the higher-attaining pupils recognising the relationship between velocity and erosion/deposition.
137. In Years 10 and 11 pupils who have chosen to study geography, continue to achieve well and the overall standard of work is below, rather than well below, the average. In predicting the weather, Year 11 pupils showed good knowledge and understanding of the conditions resulting from the location of high and low pressure areas over Britain as they interpreted a simple synoptic chart. While this group contained pupils of widely ranging abilities, all made useful presentations of their conclusions to the class.
138. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well because teachers are aware of their individual requirements and, with the very effective help of learning assistants, adjust the teaching and learning accordingly. However, in one Year 7 lesson, the learning of higher-attaining pupils was constrained by the limitations of the content and planned activities.
139. The teaching and learning of geography are good. Teachers have secure subject knowledge, for example in a Year 9 lesson, the teacher's rich description and clear explanation provided pupils with a very good introduction to the study of Japan. Teachers have a clear understanding of the National Curriculum, examination requirements and what pupils need to do to succeed. This makes their teaching particularly effective at all stages. They also have good class room and pupil management skills. The teachers, who are all new to the school, have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour, and make these very clear. Questioning at the beginning and end of each lesson checked understanding and linked the work with that done previously. The consistent emphasis on developing literacy skills, for example the use of key words, was a feature of all lessons. This helps pupils to use geographical vocabulary more confidently when answering questions and in their writing. Pupils are provided with writing frames and this, together with the frequent help provided by staff, supports improved and extended writing.
140. As a result of the interest generated by the teaching, pupils are able to sustain their concentration and complete a considerable amount of work during lessons. Their attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory overall and often good. In a Year 7 lesson, with a group including a significant proportion of pupils with a record of poor behaviour, the help of a learning assistant and a support teacher allowed all to make progress. The objective here was to manage behaviour while assessments were made of the action needed to ensure that would be able to benefit from being in the class. The only relative weakness in teaching relates to assessment. Teachers mark pupils' books regularly, but give too little guidance on how to improve their work.

141. Geography is managed well. The head of department has clear priorities and a commitment to improvement that is shared by the team. The improvement in standards achieved over the last year, stems from good teamwork and increased monitoring. Reliable data is being used to set targets, predict attainment, to monitor the progress of pupils and, with the observation of lessons, to evaluate teaching. New, detailed schemes of work have been introduced in order to improve standards and raise levels of motivation. The resources are barely adequate and the lack of textbooks limits the value of homework. The contribution of ICT to learning in this subject and the opportunities for pupils to practise their skills are unsatisfactory. The department needs to make a determined effort to gain regular access to work stations.

HISTORY

Overall, provision in history is satisfactory.

Strengths

- Good subject knowledge of teachers
- Good relationships between teachers and pupils
- Improving results at GCSE
- New resources to develop further the use of ICT in the department

Areas for improvement

- Objectives for lessons and sequences of lessons in Years 7 to 9 need to be more focused and made clearer to pupils
- Teachers should build on the good practice in the department in targeting work effectively for all pupils
- Making more use of the ICT resources and identified opportunities in the curriculum throughout the department

142. Pupils' attainment when they join the school is well below average and this is particularly evident in their writing skills. Results for teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 for 2000 are well below national expectations and similar to those noted at the time of the last inspection. Results for 2001 teacher assessments indicate a slight improvement.
143. The evidence of lessons observed and pupils' work confirmed these teacher assessments. In lessons observed, Year 9 pupils were strong in oral responses, for example confidently reporting what they had found out in previous lessons about the First World War. Higher-attaining pupils could write sustained succinct accounts, for example about the intentions and failure of the German Schlieffen Plan, though most proved to need writing prompts. Some in a top set prepared a short coherent introduction to an essay on the causes of the First World War and confidently set about organising their accounts into long and short term causes. The majority of pupils, including those giving oral information about the war, found unaided writing to be more of a challenge. One class of students in a lower-attaining set still managed, with support, to complete some writing about what they had learned. This difficulty in rising to the challenge of sustained writing was seen in a Year 7 middle set studying the English succession after the death of Edward in 1066. Pupils enthusiastically responded to questions about the contenders to the throne, but found the follow up writing tasks challenging. They had difficulty organising and writing about what they had learned. However, when measured against their standards in Year 7, pupils in Year 9 have made steady progress through the three years and their achievement is satisfactory. The detailed records kept in the department support this view.
144. GCSE results for 2000 were well below national expectations. The results for 2001 are also well below national expectations but above the school average. Standards of work observed during the inspection suggest a continued improvement at Key Stage 4 and were below average. For example, higher-attaining pupils in Year 10 could write sustained accounts of the Egyptians' use of new and traditional medical practices and suggest explanations for this mix of approaches. This is achieved by good teacher knowledge of history and the subject requirements for GCSE.
145. Some higher-attaining pupils in the Year 11 option class could write coherent accounts of events leading to the crisis in Ireland in 1912 and draw complex inferences from the source material, for example interpreting the stance of a newspaper article. Others

however, were less confident in sustaining narrative accounts and extending their discussion of the sources to include issues of bias and reliability.

146. The teaching observed was at least satisfactory, often good, and on one occasion very good. A great strength is teacher knowledge. For example in a lesson with Year 7 pupils the teacher was able to supplement the text and visual materials she had prepared on the Battle of Hastings by describing the re-enactments that regularly take place. The benefits of this were immediately evident as the class offered good descriptions of events and, importantly, what they could not be certain of and why. Pupils in the GCSE option group, where there has been improvement above the school average in recent years, were similarly focused on key questions of finding and interpreting evidence, for example about events in Ireland in 1912. Where teaching was satisfactory, too much time was wasted by teachers and learning support assistants going round explaining what had to be done where more could have been achieved with work, instructions and materials better matched to different needs. Time would then have been better used to target the learning objectives of the planned lesson and support staff could have been better deployed. These lessons remained satisfactory due to the skills and knowledge of the teachers and the learning support assistants.
147. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, especially when adult support is at hand and care has been taken to provide a suitable range of learning materials and tasks. The use of writing frames and other differentiated materials was seen to help pupils manage challenging texts and ideas, for example when sorting out events and establishing their significance as pupils' knowledge and understanding of Ireland in 1912-14 was being built up. With these the pupils proved better able to produce statements demonstrating that they had acquired a sound understanding of which events in troubled Ireland assumed particular importance. In some lessons observed, However, teachers missed opportunities similarly to adapt materials, although they ensured that they and their learning support assistants were on hand to support all children orally.
148. Teachers made effective use of film resources, the overhead projectors and the whiteboards, though when the sun shone there were problems in the rooms without blackout. The head of department has identified opportunities for the use of ICT throughout the curriculum. She has made good use of these but they have not yet been used by all the teachers of history to support pupils' learning.
149. The department is effectively managed. Developments since the last inspection include ensuring the national curriculum requirements are securely in place. The after-school club to improve GCSE course work supports the aim of raising achievement. There are good resources available including software packages for teaching history. There are good examples of appropriate differentiation of learning materials for identified pupils and groups of pupils.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The provision for ICT is good in the specialist lessons, but not satisfactory overall because it is not being used effectively in most other subjects. A significant number of pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not receive their ICT entitlement.

Strengths

- In specialist ICT lessons pupils achieve well and make good progress in developing computer skills. They are becoming confident in applying these in different tasks.
- Teaching in ICT lessons is good. The structured work and individual support in lessons enables all pupils to access the tasks set and achieve well.
- Most pupils have a very positive attitude to their work and are keen to carry out the tasks
- Accommodation is very good and the number of computers is above the national average.

Areas for improvement

- Raising standards.
- Ensuring more computer-based work in other subjects, and that it is well co-ordinated.
- Giving pupils not taking an ICT examination course in Years 10 and 11 enough opportunities to use a range of ICT skills in their other subjects.
- Ensuring all pupils have the opportunity to experience measurement and control by using computer controlled equipment.

150. The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 have been well below those reported nationally. Current work indicates that standards are improving but are still below the national average. Standards are improving because the structured programme for information technology lessons in Years 7, 8 and 9, is well planned and being well taught. GCSE results have been well below the national average for those attaining A*- C and A*- G grades. In 2000, results for both boys and girls was less than their respective national averages, However, all girls attained A*- G grades and a small proportion gained 'A' grades. In 2001 girls did better in ICT than their other subjects, and also better than the boys.
151. The specialist ICT lessons and the work in pupils' folders indicate that attainment overall is still below the national expectation in Years 7 to 11, but improving to be closer to the national average. By the age of 14, pupils are developing knowledge and skills in the use of word processing, desktop publishing, spreadsheets, and databases but there is insufficient use of measurement and control and only limited understanding about the applications and effects of computers on society. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs, demonstrate confidence when using computers. They can remember procedures and use their knowledge well in projects. Year 7 work includes successful word processing of text, Year 8 pupils use these skills in producing well formatted tables, and Year 9 pupils produce flow charts with text, imported pictures and explanatory text. All pupils, including those who have special educational needs, make good progress and achieve well because they are following well-structured courses and receive good individual teaching in lessons. Knowledge and skill levels vary with ability but all pupils are able to follow the structured approach to project work and improve their knowledge, understanding and skills. More able pupils work through tasks more quickly and achieve higher standards.
152. Current work in Years 10 and 11 indicates that standards are improving. Pupils build on their good achievement in previous years. They continue to extend their knowledge and skills in set projects and Year 11 course work indicates that they are able to demonstrate some individuality through interpretations of the work. Pupils follow good strategies for identifying and analysing problems but there are few examples of drafting and redrafting of work. They word process their notes well, and identify pieces of equipment and computer software that are most appropriate for their individual projects. They include applications of spreadsheets, databases and desktop publishing to enhance the content and presentation of work. Pupils of all ability, including those

with special educational needs, make good progress because they have access to a structured course, which is well taught. Higher-attaining pupils apply their knowledge and skills more effectively in individualised work and this enables them to achieve higher standards.

153. Although most pupils have access to a good programme for the development of ICT skills through specific lessons, the use of computers in other subjects of the curriculum is under developed. There is some good use of computers in science, modern foreign languages, and special educational needs. There are plans to extend current computer-based work in design and technology, history, geography, and religious education. However, at present, this developing good practice is not part of a sufficiently co-ordinated programme in all subjects. In addition, a significant number of pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not take an ICT option, nor do they have access to a co-ordinated programme of computer work in other subjects. The National Curriculum requirements for ICT as part are therefore not being met.
154. The overall quality of teaching in observed lessons was good. It was never less than satisfactory and in some lessons it was very good. Teachers demonstrate good technical knowledge, which enables them to deliver good class presentations and provide technical support to pupils during lessons. An appropriate range of teaching methods is used and in better lessons there is more detailed planning to focus the work of individual pupils. Good levels of individual support are built into all lessons and this, together with the structured approach to project work, provides a very good framework for pupils learning. It is particularly supportive of pupils with lower ability and those with special educational needs. Management of pupils and expectation of behaviour are very good and result in a very positive working atmosphere in lessons. Marking and assessment

155. procedures provide regular guidance, which enables pupils to improve their work. Homework is set but in some cases could be more substantial in order to provide better support for class work.
156. Overall, learning in both key stages is good and this enables all pupils to make good progress. Pupils develop their computer skills, show good knowledge retention when remembering and are developing confidence in using a number of computer programmes with increasing independence. They work at a good pace, and show interest and good concentration throughout most lessons. Overall, attitudes and behaviour are good. Pupils respond positively to the structured approach being used and most pupils engage enthusiastically in the tasks set and are keen to use computers. They show respect for their work and the facilities.
157. The department has improved well since the last inspection and the current scheme of work is enabling pupils to make significant progress and achieve well. However, more still needs to be done to develop the use of information technology in other subjects. Significant improvements have taken place to improve computer facilities to a very good standard, but the management of access to computer facilities is still affecting the use made of computers in other departments. Teaching of ICT is good and the current in-service training of staff should enable the cross curricular development of ICT to take place.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The quality of provision in languages is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Improved planning and teaching of lessons
- Improved attitudes among pupils leading to better achievement and progress by all, including those with special educational needs
- Good use of information technology

Areas for improvement:

- Raising standards: past difficulties have left pupils with insufficient knowledge and lack of confidence
- Eliminating inconsistency in teaching and raising the expectations of some teachers

158. The results of teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2000 were well below those reported nationally. Only 14 per cent of pupils attained the national benchmark Level 4 compared to the national figure of 67 per cent. Three times as many girls as boys attained level 4. In 2001, the results were even lower. Only three per cent of pupils, all of them girls, attained level 4. These results are very poor and represent no improvement since the last inspection.
159. In the current Year 9, standards of attainment, as seen both in lessons and in pupils' work, are below the national expectation. Pupils are capable of only simple spoken responses, though their listening and reading skills are somewhat more advanced. They can produce short, accurate pieces of writing using computers. On the evidence of work seen and pupils' progress this term, it is likely that standards at the end of Year 9 will improve this year.

160. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 are achieving satisfactory standards in relation to their previous learning. They speak accurately and with good pronunciation, understand French spoken by native speakers and are beginning to read and write more confidently. They use computers effectively to support their work. However, they still lack the confidence to use French independently for their own purposes.
161. GCSE results in 2000 were well below the national average and have remained so since the last inspection. Barely one in ten candidates attained grade C or above in French or German and none attained higher than grade B. Girls did twice as well as boys, but all pupils did less well in languages than in other subjects. In 2001, there was a slight improvement in French results, notably in the performance of boys. All pupils attained Grade G or above. This is above the national average. However, the German results were very poor, with no pupils attaining grade C, though all did attain grade G or above. German is no longer offered.
162. In the current Year 11, standards in both lessons and work seen are below the national expectation. Pupils are capable of independent written work at a standards up to GCSE grade C, but require support with, for example, understanding a French video, and have difficulty speaking and reading independently. They are insecure as learners and past difficulties have deprived them of a sound base of knowledge and understanding.
163. The achievement of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory in relation to their prior learning. Year 10 girls consolidated their ability to write on personal topics using computers, while boys in a parallel class improved their grasp of grammar through a sequence of activities combining listening, speaking, reading and writing. Pupils in both year groups make clear gains in knowledge and understanding in lessons, but lack of progress over time has impeded their development and they require consistent input and intervention from teachers to support their learning.
164. Pupils with special educational needs in all years make satisfactory progress. This is an improvement on the previous inspection. They benefit from effective help from learning support assistants and make good use of teaching materials designed to be clear and user-friendly. A gifted and talented pupil in Year 11 is effectively supported on an AS level course and is making sound progress.
165. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. One in three lessons is good or very good and there is little unsatisfactory teaching. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. The best teaching features lively promotion of speaking and listening, with very good teaching of pronunciation and aspects of French culture. This was particularly well illustrated in Year 7. Information technology is well used in all years. There is good pace and variety in lessons, such as that seen in Year 10, where pupils in a lower-ability group used their language skills in combination to develop their ability to use numbers in the context of shopping in France. In general, pupils are well managed and relationships with teachers are good. The few instances of unsatisfactory teaching arose when work was pitched at too low a level, when teachers did not direct and control pupils adequately and when time was spent talking about the language rather than practising it in useful settings.
166. Better teaching is having a positive impact on pupils' learning and on the standards they are achieving. This is notably the case in Years 7 to 9, where teachers' lively and committed approach is improving pupils' enthusiasm and confidence. Pupils' motivation is improving in response to more active approaches to learning combined with good

use of resources, particularly information technology. The quality of boys' learning is improving, enabling them to close the performance gap with girls.

167. Pupils' attitudes to learning French have improved significantly since the last inspection. They respond positively to lively and engaging teaching, particularly when encouraged to use language actively in realistic situations. They work well together in pairs and groups, particularly when using computers. The atmosphere in the great majority of lessons is busy and purposeful and pupils enjoy their work.
168. The department is well managed. Good documentation and curriculum plans have been produced. Good procedures for assessment are now in place. There is a stable and committed team of teachers and the accommodation and resources, especially in information technology, are good. The key issues for the department are raising standards, which will need to involve pupils through setting them clear goals and targets, and improving the overall consistency of teaching.
169. Since the previous inspection, there have been improvements in teaching, in pupils' progress and their attitudes to French. The department has the capacity to maintain this improvement.

MUSIC

The quality of provision in music is good

Strengths

- Some very good teaching enables pupils of all abilities to achieve well.
- An interesting curriculum provides pupils with a good range of opportunities for developing their musical skills, knowledge and understanding; pupils' work is constructively assessed.
- A very good range of extra-curricular activities provides very good scope for developing pupils' social and cultural interests.
- The department is very well managed.

Areas for development

- Making the quality of teaching more consistently good.

170. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2000 were a little higher than those found in the inspection. Pupils enter the school with standards well below average. The current Year 9 is reaching standards that are below national expectations in all aspects of the course. Pupils gain a basic working knowledge of pitch, rhythm and dynamics through composing and performing on keyboards and a good range of classroom instruments. By Year 9 they can record their work using graphic scores, and they have a basic knowledge of musical notation. Pupils have not studied GCSE in music for several years, except in 2000, when all passed and seventy per cent gained Grades A to C. In view of the small size of the group, comparison with national averages are of limited significance. However, the pass rate was significantly above the average for all schools for the higher grades. The attainment of boys and girls is similar.
171. Pupils achieve well in relation to their abilities because the curriculum and teaching method are carefully calculated to encourage them all to make progress. In Year 7, pupils created brief keyboard tunes to represent different animals and insects and showed a good understanding of the use of pitch, rhythm and pace to achieve effective results. In Year 8, in a blues project, pupils showed an understanding of the rhythm, metre and mood of blues music by writing their own lyrics for an 'Abbey School Blues'.

Their understanding of the expressive nature of sound develops well in Year 9, where they devise sound effects for a complicated film excerpt.

172. Teaching is good. At best it was very good during the inspection and a small amount was unsatisfactory. Teachers use their advanced practical skills well to stimulate pupils' interest and concentration. Most pupils worked with enthusiasm but their natural learning skills are under-developed and they need firm and detailed direction. Pupils' learning is satisfactory overall. In the best lessons, teachers presented pupils with small challenges which gradually increased in difficulty as pupils could cope. This helped them to become confident, enabling pupils over the whole ability range to make good progress. Teachers prepare lessons very well so that very good use is made of the time available and lessons proceed at a brisk pace. In most lessons there was firm discipline which kept pupils working and enabled many to exceed their own expectations of themselves. Teachers used questioning well to extend pupils' knowledge, thinking and speaking, and they confirmed learning at the end of lessons by reviewing what the pupils had achieved. Literacy is well developed through the extensive use of key words and written lesson objectives. In the small amount of unsatisfactory teaching, the pupils were allowed to dictate the pace of a lesson too much and their learning became inefficient.
173. The head of department manages music very well. The imaginative and varied curriculum interests pupils, and their work is carefully assessed to enable subsequent planning to be refined. Pupils have satisfactory access to ICT in music and there are firm plans to extend this. There is good monitoring of teaching across the department, including effective line management to assist the development of the subject and the professional development of the teachers. A very good range of extra-curricular activities provides pupils with very good opportunities for developing their social and cultural skills. Various ensembles rehearse and perform regularly in the school and the community. Regular events include a stage musical every two years, of which the most recent was 'Grease', which involved a large number of pupils. There are good musical links with feeder schools. Since the previous inspection the curriculum has been adapted to meet the needs of lower-attaining pupils more effectively, existing strengths have been maintained, and the overall improvement has been satisfactory.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The provision for physical education is good.

Strengths

- Teaching and learning is good.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils.
- Teaching methods and styles meet pupil needs.
- Leadership and management are strong.

Areas for improvement

- Making more use of ICT
- Giving pupils more access to assessment information to help them improve and set themselves targets.

174. Pupils join the school with skills and understanding which are below average. Their use of strength and awareness of body positioning in gymnastics in maintaining balance is below expected standards. In 2001 teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were below average compared with schools nationally. More boys than girls reached level 5 or above. The results reflect the findings of the last inspection. However, pupils are

achieving well in relation to their previous attainment at the start of the course in Year 7. The evidence of pupils' work observed during the inspection indicates that the standard attained by pupils at the end of Year 9 is average overall. It is higher than the test results because of effective teaching and learning and new appointments made within the department.

175. GCSE results have improved since the last inspection and the results in 2001 were better than in previous years. In 2000 the GCSE results were well below the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining A* to C was well below the national average and the proportion gaining at least a grade G was at the national average. Pupils did better in physical education than they did in their other subjects. Only boys were entered for the examination.
176. Year 7 pupils have difficulty with the rules of the games and are inaccurate with passing and placing the ball. By Year 9 pupils are accurate and confident. They target passes in rugby and netball. They are aware of safety, apply techniques and have a sound knowledge of the rules. High attaining pupils in Year 9 are able to identify positioning in netball and perform the footwork rule consistently. Low attaining pupils find positioning difficult, especially in remembering the restricted zones in the game, and footwork is variable.
177. By the end of Year 11 pupils are working at an average level. The department has been reorganised with new specialist teachers with designated responsibilities. This has had a significant impact on standards. High-attaining pupils in Year 11 GCSE classes show good skills in dribbling in football and dodging in both football and netball. They anticipate play well to intercept the ball and make strong, effective passes. In football they apply the offside trap effectively. Low attaining pupils, in non-GCSE groups, have the skills and techniques but are unable to apply them to best effect so passes are not so well directed and rules, such as contact and offside in netball, are not applied consistently. Pupils in Year 10 and Year 11 achieve well because of the new direction and focus in the department which is centred on pupils' needs and their success.
178. Pupils of differing abilities achieve satisfactorily because teachers are adaptable and are aware of pupils' strengths and weaknesses. For example, the timetable has been designed to enable physically disabled pupils to participate. Teachers speak clearly, repeat teaching points and make good explanations and demonstrations. This assists all pupils but it is particularly beneficial for low attaining pupils.
179. Overall the teaching observed was good. Teaching was most effective in Year 10 where teachers were adept in focussing pupils on the criteria for examination success. For example, in one Year 10 theory lesson the teacher used familiar, everyday objects to help pupils understand the physiology of the body. The hinge of the door in the classroom was used to understand the plane of movement in a hinge joint. Pupils were able to identify the joints and relate this to practical activities. The weaknesses observed were mainly in classroom management when teachers talked over the noise of pupils or pupils made noises with the equipment, for example bouncing balls, so making it difficult for other pupils to hear and learn. In some lessons key words were used, for example, tension and extension. Pupils showed their understanding in practical work but they also used these words confidently in feedback on one another's work. Understanding and use of these words helps performance and assists with vocabulary for use elsewhere.

180. As a result of the good teaching, learning is also good. Pupils worked imaginatively in a Year 8 gymnastics lesson to improve and perfect their sequences, concentrating on starting positions, linking movements, extension and tension and finishing. They were able to comment positively and learn from one another's examples. Learning was weak when pupils in a Year 7 lesson, practising a dodging exercise were unsure about the rotation of practices in groups or the number of times the practice should be repeated. The practice was therefore less effective in terms of re-inforcement of learning.
181. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory. They respond enthusiastically to the challenging work set. In a Year 10 aerobics lesson, pupils co-operated well so that all in the group could manage the task that they had been set to demonstrate to the rest of the group. Some non-participants were inattentive when they were not sufficiently involved in the learning.
182. Management of the department is good. New appointments and responsibilities have added strength to physical education teaching and the standards, attitudes and response of pupils have improved. The department works well as a team. For example, teachers share knowledge and select activities which best motivate their pupils. Most of the weaknesses in the last report have been addressed well. Behaviour and attitudes have improved so that learning is satisfactory. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is in line with the National Curriculum expectations, and generous staffing of GCSE classes enhances the achievement of Year 10 and Year 11 pupils. Extra-curricular provision is satisfactory and participation rates have improved although some non-participation still causes difficulties of continuity in girls' groups in Year 10 and 11. Practical areas are clean, but boys' toilet facilities in the gym area are unsatisfactory. ICT provision is unsatisfactory, but the department has been allocated money towards improving facilities this year and has planned well for this. Assessment is now satisfactory and teachers keep accurate records of pupils' performance. Targets and levels are well displayed but this information is not sufficiently shared with pupils to enable them to set their own targets for improvement.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

183. The quality of provision in Religious Education is unsatisfactory overall

Strengths

- The attainment of a high proportion of the year group entered for the GCSE examination
- The curriculum arrangements for the subject ensure access for all pupils in the main school
- All teachers share a commitment to improvement
- RE makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Areas for improvement

- Improving the unsatisfactory teaching and ineffective learning in some lessons
- Improving the behaviour of some pupils in lessons as it has a negative impact on the learning of others
- Making more use of ICT in learning
- Meeting statutory requirements for RE in the sixth form

184. Pupils join the school with knowledge skills and understanding that are well below the average, particularly in terms of their literacy skills. The standard of work at the end of

Year 9 is still well below average, approximately a third of pupils reaching the required standard. Their written work is weak containing many spelling errors and poor punctuation. Pupils respond well to questions; they are able to recall factual details and have a satisfactory understanding of the important ideas covered. For example, in a Year 9 lesson higher-attaining pupils interpreted the parable of 'The Good Samaritan', advancing their understanding of racism and how this might affect their own lives. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory at this stage.

185. GCSE results have improved significantly since the last inspection. It is usual for approximately three-quarters of the year group to be entered for the short course examination. The results in 2000 were well below the national average, though better than in most other subjects. Results for 2001 show a further improvement with the proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to G being broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving A* to C was very low. In both years, girls did much better than boys.
186. In Years 10 and 11 all pupils study the subject and achieve well, though the overall standard of work is well below average. The work in their folders shows that they acquire steadily the knowledge and understanding required for the examination. Their understanding of the characteristics, tenets and practices of different faith groups is sound and they recognise the impact religious ethics can have in society. Year 11 pupils were able to show this in a lesson where lower-attaining pupils discussed marriage and divorce. They gave mature consideration to the issue.
187. The teaching and learning of religious education are variable. They were unsatisfactory overall even though there were examples of good and very good teaching and learning because over a third of lessons observed were unsatisfactory. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject and a very good understanding of local and GCSE requirements. In the most successful lessons they had high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour and made these very clear. The frequent use of questioning involved pupils, reinforced understanding and identified links with previous learning. The teachers' interest in, and commitment to, the subject are clear. The marking of work is thorough and serves to motivate pupils. Good resources were used with enthusiasm as when a Year 7 group reflected on responsibility and the environment following the reading of a well-chosen story. Most pupils show interest and, with encouragement and support, are co-operative. Lessons were unsatisfactory where the management of disruptive behaviour was ineffective and the actions of a few had a negative impact on the learning. This was due in part to the choice of activities and tasks that did not meet the needs of pupils. For example, a Year 10 group did not have the confidence necessary to consider and share their understanding of the story of 'The Woman taken in Adultery'. In a Year 8 lesson a drawing exercise did nothing to develop pupils' understanding of responsibility or improve their literacy skills. Opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of the views of those of other faiths were not always exploited fully.
188. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Teachers are aware of their needs and, where learning assistants are available, can provide the support needed. However, more assistance should be provided, in all years, where classes contain significant numbers of pupils with behavioural problems.
189. The consistent emphasis on developing literacy skills was a feature of all lessons, for example, key words are posted and pupils build-up glossaries of terms in their books. Writing frames are used to try to overcome the lack of confidence in writing shared by so many of the pupils. Pupils are encouraged to read but more could be done to

encourage listening. While Year 10 have the opportunity to use computers in researching topics at the end of the year, insufficient use is made of ICT in the teaching and learning.

190. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Opportunities are identified in the schemes of work and examples were seen in the lessons observed, for example, work with Year 9 pupils involved the discussion of stereotyping and discrimination. A 'Festivals Committee' has been set-up where pupils can identify ways in which festivals of different faiths might be celebrated in the school.
191. Curriculum arrangements are good; all pupils have access to the subject and the time available has been increased since the last report. The recently appointed teacher in charge of the subject has made very good progress in revising the schemes of work. Accommodation is good, though resources limited; the department has too few artefacts and there are not enough books in the library. The management of the subject is satisfactory and is benefiting from school wide developments encouraging the focused use of data in evaluating and monitoring teaching and learning. The department has the commitment and capacity necessary for further improvement.

PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

192. In the inspection five subjects and courses: AS and GCSE English, AS and GCSE mathematics, AS sociology, advanced and intermediate vocational qualifications in information and communications technology and in art were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in advanced and intermediate vocational qualifications graphics, business studies, health and social care, leisure and recreation, performing arts and AS general studies was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school. The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001

GCE AS level courses 2001

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	2	50		0		1	
Chemistry	2	50	54	50	37	2	5.5
Physics	1	100	78	0	16	1	1.9
Mathematics	1	0	63	0	17	0	1.6

GCE A level and AVCE courses 2001

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
A level courses							
Business studies	5	100	91	20	30	4.8	5.3
Sociology	6	100	88	0	37	5	5.5
Art	3	67	90	0	45	2.7	6.4
English	8	100	36	13	96	4.3	5.9
Advanced vocational courses							
Information technology	9	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	12.7	9.7

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

Overall the quality of provision in mathematics is unsatisfactory.

Strengths

- Teachers give clear explanations which aid learning
- Relationships are good

Areas for improvement

- Standards achieved by students are low
- The range of courses offered is inappropriate
- There is a lack of clear educational direction and priorities for development
- The use of ICT to enhance students learning in mathematics is underdeveloped

193. The inspection covered both of the two-year AS courses: one in mathematics being followed by students in Year 13 and the other in statistics being followed by students in Year 12. In addition the retake GCSE course for those who did not gain grade C in Year 11 was inspected. The school does not offer a separate course leading to the key skills qualification but key skills are taught as part of GNVQ courses.
194. In 2000 no candidates achieved a pass in A level mathematics and the course is no longer offered. Although some candidates following the AS course achieved grade E, but the majority were unsuccessful. Numbers entering for A and AS examinations are small so comparisons with national results are not statistically significant. Most of the candidates had achieved a grade B in their GCSE examinations two years earlier. All students retaking the GCSE examination in mathematics in 2000 improved their grades and one student achieved a grade C pass. GCSE results for 2001 indicate that the majority of candidates did not improve their grade on retaking the examination.
195. Standards in the work seen during the inspection both in lessons and in the student work sample indicate that standards are below those expected of AS students and below those expected for students retaking GCSE examinations. AS students in Year 13 studying a unit in pure mathematics could use a general rule to generate a sequence, but had difficulty in finding a general rule for a given sequence. They were able to solve simultaneous equations algebraically and find roots of quadratic equations by formula. They sometimes had difficulty evaluating numbers with negative indices. Year 12 AS students showed a good understanding of leaf and stem representation and grouped frequency distribution. They could explain with confidence the interpretation of histograms but had some difficulty in defining median. Students following the GCSE course could find averages from grouped data but had weak numeracy skills: many had difficulty adding a column of seven numbers without the aid of a calculator.
196. Students' achievement, the progress they make relative to their abilities and prior learning, is satisfactory on both AS and GCSE courses. Most students following the AS courses had achieved grades B or C in their GCSE examination. Those on the GCSE course had previously achieved grades D to G.
197. Students' attitudes and behaviour are good overall. Students have positive attitudes to their work. AS students value being taught by a teacher whom they have known for

several years. Students take a pride in their work and this is evident in the high level of presentation of their written work. The quality of relationships is a particular strength.

198. The quality of teaching and the quality of learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers give clear explanations. For example, in one AS lesson the teacher's explanations of oscillating, convergent and periodic sequences enabled the students to reinforce and extend their knowledge of sequences and, in another, clear explanations enabled them to gain a good understanding of methods of summarising data. Students are very dependent on the teacher and show very little initiative or originality although they are willing learners.
199. The present curriculum is not enabling students to achieve success in external examinations at AS or to improve significantly on their current grades for GCSE. The appropriateness of the courses and their teaching needs to be reviewed in relation to students' results. Students have limited opportunities to use ICT to enhance their learning in mathematics and they do not use graphic calculators.
200. Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory. There has not been a rise in standards. Leadership does not provide a clear educational direction; there are no appropriate priorities for development and there is insufficient professional development. Evaluation of the subject's performance is underdeveloped.

BUSINESS STUDIES

201. Business studies was not one of the areas inspected in detail. However, lessons were sampled and students' work scrutinised. The provision of vocational courses at intermediate and advanced levels in this area is good and they are well managed. Students work hard and are increasingly independent. They carry out a good range of business-related assignments which require the effective use of ICT. Although initially their ability to analyse information is limited, this improves over time. They have valuable work-related experience and in general are achieving well when their work is compared with their attainment at GCSE.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision of ICT in the sixth form is very good.

Strengths

- Results in the GNVQ advanced ICT course are above the national average. This represents very good achievement for the students taking the course
- Students have a good grasp of basic theory and confidently create complex data systems
- Teaching is very good overall. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and very good relationships with students, and students are well motivated to learn
- Students work very well together both in lessons and in extra ICT activities in their own time in school.

Areas for development

- Students' use of local business and industry for ICT projects is limited
- Students do not keep track of their own progress very effectively.

202. There is a good range of courses at intermediate (GNVQ) and advanced (AVCE) level to meet the needs of most sixth form students. Courses build on good GCSE provision in Years 10 and 11 but are open to all students, whether or not they have already taken GCSE in the subject.
203. The most recent school results for GNVQ in ICT have been above national averages both for the proportion of students completing the course and for the achievement of merit and distinction grades. In 2001, nearly half of students gained distinction grades, a similar proportion to 2000. Pass rates on the intermediate course are satisfactory, considering the students' GCSE achievements before they started the sixth form course. Overall, sixth form ICT results are now better than they were at the time of the last inspection due to consistently good teaching and better computer equipment
204. In lessons and work seen, AVCE (Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education) students achieve very well overall from comparatively low GCSE starting points, and their achievement is enhanced because of the extra time they spend outside lessons to work on ICT projects for the school. They present work to a high standard and show a good level of all-round competence in a number of software applications. Spreadsheets with advanced formulae showing employees' attendance rates and clear design specifications that meet user requirements for a fictitious business are examples of work where creativity and challenge feature strongly in students' design specifications. Students' feasibility studies are quite thorough, with comprehensive design and testing built in. Evaluation is constructive and well considered. Students have a good general understanding of customer needs and understand why customer identities need to be checked (referential integrity). Whilst students have fairly good theoretical knowledge of stock control systems in business, they do not make sufficient use of real industrial examples to generate stock control problems which they can solve in their projects. It was only possible to see a very small sample of Year 12 students' work as the course has only recently started. Progress was at least satisfactory.
205. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. In a Year 13 lesson seen, tasks were very well planned to consolidate theory on Access databases through challenging tasks where students created customer databases for later interrogation. Teachers made lesson expectations very clear, and gave students a series of short deadlines in a lesson in which their learning was plainly rapid.
206. Students showed considerable interest and enthusiasm for the subject, when working individually on computers and when working with each other to solve problems. They enthusiastically joined in class discussions about their work, helped by teachers' challenging questions, which reinforced basic concepts. Students are able to work on their computers at home to extend their project work because teachers have high expectations and give them extra tasks. A student with special educational needs was well supported and achieved very well, improving his report writing skill through sustained practice. He combined his studies effectively with paid employment as the school technician. The pace of learning overall in lessons is very good because teachers frequently check whether students properly understand the terms and processes used before moving on.
207. Teachers lead and manage information technology very well in the sixth form. Staff involved work excellently as a team and have clear vision for further improvement. Technical support is mostly provided by teaching staff and sixth form students together. A well-organised system of recording individual results for each module, comparing current standards with previous attainment, and predicting grades, is used. It is

successful in monitoring individual students' progress and identifying possible underachievement. Teachers regularly meet to discuss improvements and attend exhibitions with software suppliers in order to expand the school's range of programs for students' use. Students' high GNVQ standards are added to by opportunities within school to work on systems analysis and web design. This provides new software on the school's intranet which younger students can use. The sixth form work is very successful, and the ICT department is very well placed to improve further.

LEISURE AND RECREATION

208. Leisure and recreation was not one of the areas inspected in detail but lessons were sampled. As with other vocational areas this is a relatively new course which is so far successfully meeting the needs of students who wish to continue in education and follow a more vocationally orientated course. The assignments and teaching approach are good, meeting the requirements of the course and encouraging students to develop their independence, and their research and planning skills.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

209. Health and social care was not one of the areas inspected in detail, However, lessons were sampled and students' work scrutinised. The work on the vocational courses in this area is good and they are well managed. The teaching approach encourages independence while at the same time giving students the confidence they need to work independently. The lessons and assignments seen were well structured to enable students to develop their knowledge and skills in a wide range of health-related issues and areas such as child care and care of the elderly. Many students are able to progress from the intermediate courses to the advanced. They talk with confidence about their work and clearly enjoy and benefit from their work placements. They are also well aware of the career opportunities in this field. In general they are achieving well.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

ART AND DESIGN

Overall, the quality of provision is unsatisfactory.

Strengths

- Teachers' expertise and knowledge of the subject
- Teacher' commitment to, and success in, providing opportunities for all

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation and resources - currently inadequate for post 16 courses
- More rigorous use of assessment information to plan small steps for learning and identify most suitable teaching methods.
- Extending students' knowledge and understanding, intellectual curiosity and independence.
- The quality, range and amount of work produced

210. In previous years too few students have been entered for examinations to make comparisons and draw reliable conclusions about trends in attainment and achievement. Over the past three years small numbers of students have been successful in A-level examinations and vocational courses. The results of students taking Foundation and GNVQ advanced and intermediate courses were average showing that most attained pass or distinction grades. In 2001 three pupils were entered for A level art and gained B, C and E grades. Overall, although numbers have been small the school has promoted post -16 education and students who might otherwise have rejected further or higher education have continued their education. Over recent years there has been a small but significant number of students going on to higher education to study in arts related subjects. Given the low standards on entry this suggests good achievement.
211. Standards of work seen during the inspection were well below the average for A level and GNVQ qualifications although the standard of work of a minority of students was close to average. Sixth form students have been severely affected by the unstable staffing situation that prevailed during the time they were in Key Stages 3 and 4. Their learning then was severely disrupted resulting in weak skill development and gaps in knowledge and understanding. Students were affected in different ways. Some have been able to make up for the time when they had non-specialist teaching, while others either chose not to opt for the subject or lost the motivation to continue. Achievement is sound overall given very low attainment when students begin sixth form courses. Achievement of a smaller number of students, on track to complete two-year advanced courses, is good. Over time they have clearly benefited from the teaching and guidance they have received.
212. There are some strengths but also some important weaknesses holding back further improvement. A notable strength is the progress made by students with learning and behavioural difficulties. The department is committed to providing opportunities for all and has achieved considerable success.
213. The work sample provided by the school show that sketchbooks are underdeveloped. The range of work in them is too narrow and investigations lack depth and rigor. There are few written comments that provide insights into students' involvement in the subject and their intellectual curiosity. In discussion, a student gave an enthusiastic account of her plans to pursue her interest in archaeology and yet she had not sought to develop this in her art course. Other students do not speak with the same confidence and authority about their work and they struggle to make connections between their own work and work they have seen in galleries and books. Critical skills are weak and require more focused teaching. These weaknesses cause many students to rely on teachers to suggest the next course of action rather than take an increasing responsibility for their own learning. Their independence is further limited by not having access to a designated studio space where they can work outside lessons. Those who have stayed on and have continued their studies into a second year of advanced study have found ways around these practical difficulties. Their progress has been helped by having a secure knowledge of the examination marking criteria and by teachers' ongoing assessments of their work. The Year 12 group, in the first half term of their course, is considerably larger. It includes some students whose prior attainment is low and several who are not expected to complete the course. Progress and productivity are slow and at times lacking urgency and purpose.

214. Attitudes to the subject are sound overall. Students visit galleries in this country and some travel abroad. Teaching and learning are sound overall. Students are interested in the subject and enjoy the opportunities available to them. Teachers have a good knowledge of post 16 courses and the courses on offer in higher education. Their on-going assessments are shared with students and used purposefully to plan follow-up work. In some lessons However, because the methods of achieving the learning were not planned so thoroughly, there were times when learning objectives were not fully met or took longer to achieve than they should have done.
215. Management of the department is satisfactory. Staff are aware of weaknesses in accommodation and resources and have worked hard to make improvements. Previous difficulties in staffing have been resolved, providing a good match to the curriculum. Information about qualifications, course requirements and expectations of work-load are not sufficiently clear to students when they join the courses. There is a need to improve levels of understanding to enable them to take greater responsibility for their learning. Achievements in art and other subjects were not closely scrutinised when students enrolled onto post-16 courses and this has raised expectations that are unlikely to be fully realised.

PERFORMING ARTS

216. The vocational course in the performing arts was not one of the areas inspected in detail, However, lessons were sampled and students' work scrutinised. The work on the vocational courses in this area is good and they are well managed. Music is an important element in the performing arts course. During the inspection, outstanding teaching of a combined sixth form performing arts group enabled students to make excellent progress in developing a good range of appropriate skills.

HUMANITIES

Sociology

The quality of provision for AS level sociology is satisfactory.

Strengths

- Teachers' expertise and knowledge of the subject
- Teacher' commitment to, and success in, providing opportunities for all

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation and resources - currently inadequate for post 16 courses
- More rigorous use of assessment information to plan small steps for learning and identify most suitable teaching methods.
- Extending students' knowledge and understanding, intellectual curiosity and independence.
- The quality, range and amount of work produced

217. AS level sociology is a new course for Year 12 and Year 13 students working together in the first year of their course. Recent results in A level sociology provide insufficient evidence for comparison because of the very low entry. Sociology was not inspected at the previous inspection.
218. The standard of attainment observed during the inspection was below average. This is an early judgement for students on a new AS course and is based on below average attainment at GCSE. They have made a satisfactory start on their course. Students are beginning to understand the functionalist theory through the ordering of primitive society. They are able to identify the differences between primary and secondary sources in preparation for research. At this stage the students discuss topics satisfactorily and are beginning to make links between different aspects of society. Any weaknesses are related to students' inadequate vocabulary. For example, words like monogamous, heterosexual and polygamy were not understood. The teacher had to explain the meanings even after breaking the words down to assist understanding. The students' achievement is satisfactory because of their low baseline at GCSE.
219. The teaching of sociology is satisfactory overall. The teachers have good subject knowledge and clear explanations on the theory of the functionalist perspective were made. One teacher was particularly skilled at linking contemporary events to sociological theory. For example, the setting up of laws in a primitive society was related to recent and current events in Afghanistan. Links between the dominance of religion in that society and its impact on laws were analysed. Norms and values in this society were used in understanding racist views from a dysfunctional perspective by another society where norms and values differ.
220. Where teaching was good successful methods drew out students' understanding by a combination of question and answer sessions, discussion, analysis, comparison and note taking. A mixture of familiar situations and controversial topics stimulated students' interest. For example, the values and norms of marriage, abortion, suicide and euthanasia were the basis of lively debates. One teacher used students' basic knowledge of the interdependent working of organs in a comparison of how the body and society work. Students then understood how the body and society could break down similarly if one component was not functioning properly. The same teacher used students' answers to ensure a positive learning result. This boosted students'

confidence and skilfully emphasised points for learning. Students are ready to listen to one another and most are happy to exchange ideas in discussion. Overall they are making satisfactory progress.

221. As a result of this satisfactory teaching, students show enthusiasm for their learning and they are beginning to keep a glossary of sociological terms to assist their understanding, and for revision purposes. Organisation of student notes varies in quality and value. For example, some work is not headed and full answers to questions are not given, making the topic unclear for revision purposes.
222. The head of department is managing the department well. The scheme of work contains the essential components of the course; it is developing to include target setting for students. Guidance is given on resource material and teaching methods. Teachers update their knowledge through networking with other sociology teachers and through courses. Better communication and systematic monitoring and tracking of students in the sixth form would assist continuity in the classroom. For example the course is a popular one and where the numbers of students attending fluctuated, this caused some disruption for the group while the teacher updated new students. However, department initiatives provide a good basis for raising the standard of the sociology course in the sixth form.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

Overall, the quality of provision in English is unsatisfactory.

Strengths

- Teachers provide students with good support to help them with their courses.
- A few students have done well in the modules that have been examined during the last school year.

Areas for improvement

- Standards and students' results, which are too low.
- The teaching, so that it builds more systematically on students' previous learning.
- The planning of the curriculum for the various courses.

223. Although most students taking A Level English courses enter the sixth form with a grade C or better at GCSE, overall their attainment on entry to the course is well below that expected. This is because they have not read widely enough within and beyond their GCSE courses, and have low levels of knowledge of key concepts and techniques in English. The standard attained by the end of their courses is also well below what is expected, and students' achievement is unsatisfactory. Consequently, English results are low. The numbers taking A Level examinations have varied considerably from year to year, and are too small to make reliable judgements about trends over time. In 2000, all those who sat the examination gained an E grade or better, but overall the results were significantly below the national average as the pass rate at grades A-B was low and in 2001, the results were lower. The results of the students currently taking AS and A2 courses are also below expectations in the modules tested. Although the few students who gained higher grades did well, most students have not done as well as their GCSE results indicated that they should. Results were also low for the Year 12 students taking the GCSE re-sit examinations.
224. The written work seen during the inspection showed that, as at GCSE, most AS and A2 students are competent in the areas of recounting plot and discussing character in the texts they have studied. Difficulties in spelling and grammatical accuracy continue to

lower the quality of their work. This is often because the students are trying to use more complex language, based on class discussion of the topic. Overall, students have completed too little written coursework. Mostly, the work is based on information provided by their teacher, including many photocopied sheets. While this has structured students' answers helpfully, it has not enabled them to produce detailed, analytical answers independently, and so to develop their skills and understanding. The written work of the AS students was of a lower standard than their finished GCSE coursework essays. Some students' irregular attendance has slowed their progress, as was shown by incomplete work and some gaps in what they have covered. This has also affected how well the GCSE re-sit students learn. Those who attend the lessons have made careful notes on the topics covered, but show a low level of understanding of concepts. For example, in a lesson on persuasive style, GCSE re-sit students had great difficulty in using alliteration and rhetorical questions.

225. The teaching of English to post-16 students is unsatisfactory, although with some strengths. These include teachers' encouragement of pupils and their knowledgeable presentation of information. Sometimes, teachers take account of students' lack of knowledge and adapt the work accordingly. For example, Year 12 students analysing the language of a Wilfred Owen poem showed little understanding of metaphor, but the varied activities and the teacher's leading questions enabled them to begin to see how extended metaphor works in the poem. As in all the lessons observed, the students lacked confidence and so they made few contributions to the discussion. They depended heavily on their teacher, and rarely suggested ideas of their own. Weaknesses in teaching were usually caused by the teacher not matching the work to the students' needs, as when an A2 class was asked to transform an extract from a play into a sonnet. This was unsuccessful as the students did not know the features of a sonnet and the guidance they were given was unhelpful.
226. Other factors affect the quality of provision for English. The AS level course is studied over two years, for three lessons a week, instead of over one year with six lessons each week. The three lessons are split between two teachers, meaning that one unit of the course is taught once a week and will be examined after two years. These timetabling arrangements are poor because the infrequency of the lessons combined with the students' difficulties in recalling previous work means that they make slow progress. Although the department put considerable effort into ensuring that they adopted the most appropriate syllabus, the lack of curricular planning for its implementation affects the quality of teaching and learning. The evidence shows that teaching has tended to focus on the content to be covered, with insufficient attention to developing students' understanding and building on their previous learning. The lack of a scheme of work covering the courses offered in the sixth form contributes to this weakness. For example, the Year 12 students who have joined the A2 class are disadvantaged as the work is not adapted to take account of the difference in their knowledge and skills compared to that of the other, Year 13 students. The department has also not produced planning to guide the teaching of the GCSE re-sit course. Teachers know their students well individually, and give much constructive advice in lessons, but they make too little use of assessment, including marking, to help them improve.
227. The teachers have done their best to overcome the above difficulties by offering extra lessons after school. This commitment to students' success is reflected in the good relationships shown in lessons. However, despite this the leadership and management of English in the sixth form is unsatisfactory, as is the improvement in the subject since the last inspection.

